

Complete Novel: **SOUND OF THE SCYTHE**

MAC 10

# AMAZING

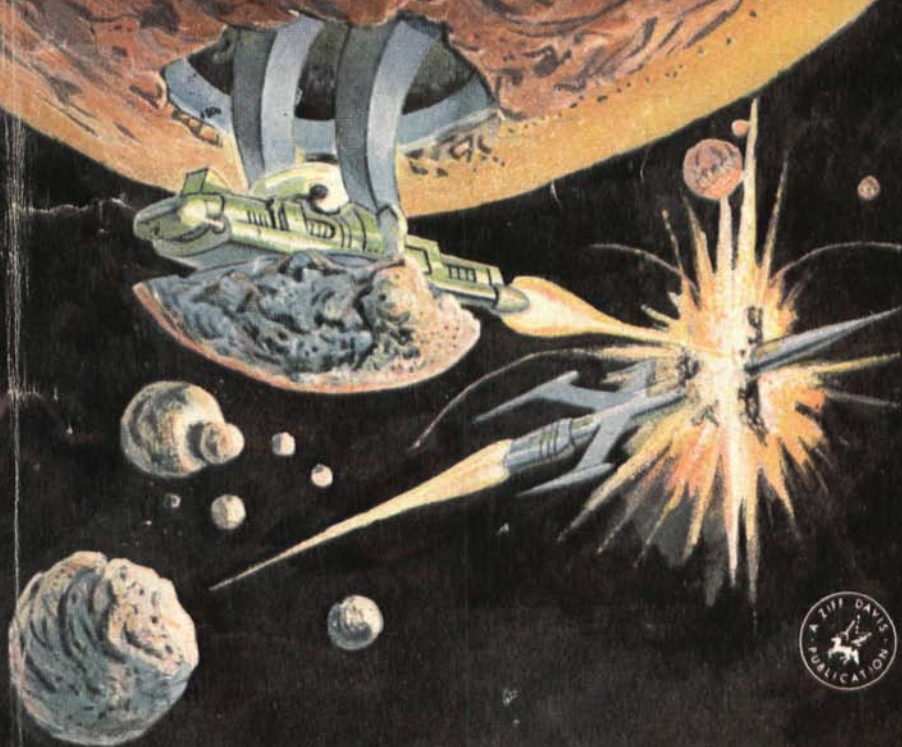
SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

OCTOBER

**TRIPLE TIME TRY**

**By Les Collins**

**35¢**



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

take a trip on a  
**MAGIC, MAGIC CARPET**  
*in October* **FANTASTIC**

Sultans, eunuchs, and harem girls mingle with artificial satellites, moon rockets, and confused rocketeers—as the future and past get all mixed up in an attempt to conquer the moon!

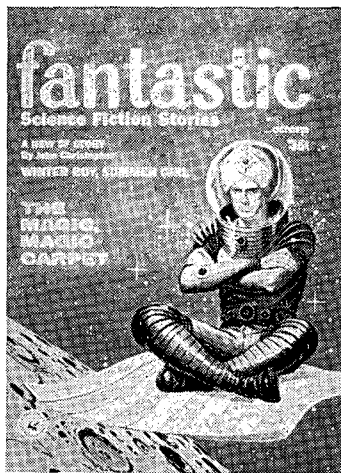
**PLUS:** John Christopher (author of the Saturday Evening Post serial, “No Blade of Grass”) makes his first appearance in FANTASTIC with a heart-warming tale: “Winter Boy, Summer Girl.”



DON'T MISS  
the October issue of  
**FANTASTIC**

—on sale September 22

only 35¢



AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, Vol. 33, No. 10, October 1959, is published monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1946-1953), at 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago 5, Illinois. Second-class postage paid at Chicago, Ill. Subscription rates: U. S. and possessions and Canada \$3.50 for 12 issues; Pan American Union Countries \$4.00; all other foreign countries \$4.50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# E d i t o r i a l

IF YOU'RE a faithful reader of *Amazing*—and who could resist? —you'll remember the furor we stirred up by printing Eric Frank Russell's attack on astronomy, in which he cited chapter and verse to deny it as an exact science.

Not being expert ourselves in spectrochromatic analysis, or in deciphering radio waves, we tried to be neutral. But a recent news item threatens to tip the scale in favor of Mr. Russell.

Reason? The item reports that Nobel prizewinner Dr. Harold Urey, an expert on stellar chemistry, now says it may be that the moon—long pictured by astronomers as a cold, dead body—may actually be active. The moon may have a hot interior, may have a constantly shifting and erupting surface, and possibly even some kind of atmosphere.

This new view of the moon backs up observations made some months ago by a Russian scientist. He sighted a gas eruption from one of the craters. Naturally, all us advanced Westerners laughed. "Ha, ha, these Soviets . . . don't they know the moon is cold and dead?" But now, suddenly, the Russian's report is cited as proof of the new theory.

Well, nobody will really know anything about the moon for a few years . . . until one of us gets up there. But it is certainly surprising that a celestial body only 200,000 miles away can give our boys so much trouble. Makes you think twice, doesn't it, Mr. Russell?—NL

# AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

OCTOBER 1959

Volume 33 Number 10

**Publisher**

MICHAEL MICHAELSON

**Editorial Director**

NORMAN M. LOBSENZ

**Editor**

CELE GOLDSMITH

**Art Editor**

SID GREIFF



## COMPLETE NOVEL

### SOUND OF THE SCYTHE

By Harlan Ellison..... 76

## SHORT STORIES

### TRIPLE-TIME TRY

By Les Collins..... 6

### THE MOST IMPORTANT MAN IN THE WORLD

By Darius John Granger..... 21

### UNAUTHORIZED

By Harold Calin..... 39

### EXCELLENCE

By Tom Purdom..... 50

### THEY LIKE US

By John Brady..... 62

## FEATURES

EDITORIAL..... 3

THE SPECTROSCOPE..... 74

...OR SO YOU SAY..... 142

COMING NEXT MONTH..... 20



Cover: LEO SUMMERS

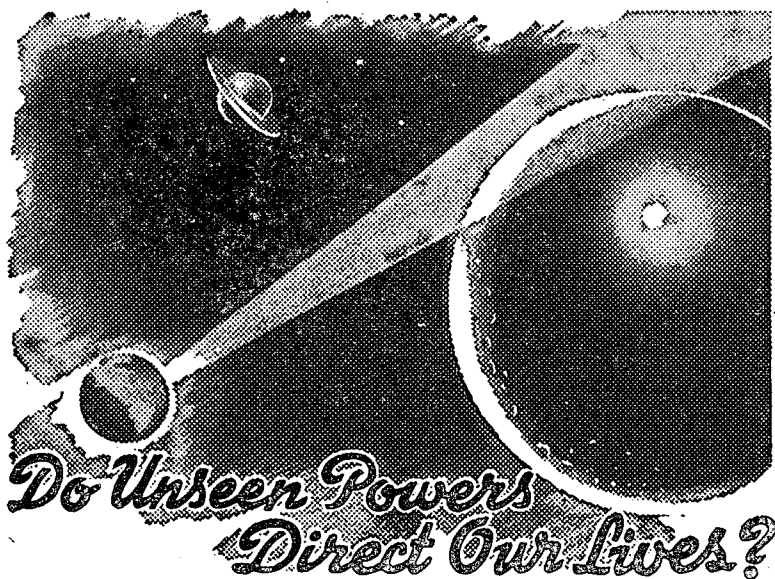
ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY, One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York. William Ziff, President; W. Bradford Briggs, Executive Vice President; Michael Michaelson, Vice President and Circulation Director; H. B. Sarbin, Vice President; J. Leonard O'Donnell, Treasurer.



Copyright © 1959 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED





**A**RE the tales of strange human powers false? Can the mysterious feats performed by the mystics of the Orient be explained away as only illusions? Is there an intangible bond with the universe beyond which draws mankind on? Does a mighty Cosmic intelligence from the reaches of space ebb and flow through the deep recesses of the mind, forming a river of wisdom which can carry men and women to the heights of personal achievement?

### **Have You Had These Experiences?**

... that unmistakable feeling that you have taken the wrong course of action, that you have violated some inner, unexpressed, better judgement? The sudden realization that the silent whisperings of self are cautioning you to keep your own counsel—not to speak words on the tip of your tongue in the presence of another. That something which pushes you forward when you hesitate, or restrains you when you are apt to make a wrong move.

These urges are the subtle *influence* which when understood and directed has made thousands of men and women masters of their lives. There IS a source of intelligence within you as natural as your senses of sight and hearing, and more dependable, which you are NOT using now! Challenge this statement! Dare the Rosicrucians to reveal the functions of this Cosmic mind and its great possibilities to you.

### **Let This Free Book Explain**

Take this infinite power into your partnership. You can use it in a rational and practical way without interference with your religious beliefs or personal affairs. The Rosicrucians, a world-wide philosophical movement, *invite you* to write today for your *Free* copy of the fascinating book, "The Mastery of Life" which explains further. Address your request to Scribe L.J.V.

**The ROSICRUCIANS**  
(AMORC)

San Jose, California

# TRIPLE-TIME TRY

By LES COLLINS

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

*They say everything happens in  
California.... Well, all right...  
but three times over?*

LOOK, friend—the word is used in a supertrue sense—don't try to kill me, please. I had a reason for wanting to kill you. I was wrong, so be patient, see my side. By now, you should know my death won't insure *your* reality.

In case you still haven't got the idea, I'll spell it out. We hope to save all three of us. We've got to work fast—*by noon today!* So you damn well better get off your complacent butt, bring the rest of the stuff to the beach, and help us. Granted, this could be a plot to finish you, but we are leaving the gun.

I'm a geologist, of course; if my name, Ernie Stoffer, sounds funnier to you than to most, you'll know why. It's yours, too. A few days (whatever those are) ago, I was in the Duncan Mills area, very close to the coast.

I was mapping a stringer of Franciscan sandstone-chert complex, and had worked south along one of those ubiquitous, brush-covered ridges of the Coast Range. Leaving the ridge, I climbed down some 40 feet to a small beach; it looked as though no one had ever set foot there before. The Pacific was before me; the cliff was at my back. Here and there the beach was dotted with talus, big hunks of rock that had dropped from above.

It was just about lunch time. I sat with my back against the cliff and unhooked my web belt, my useful belt to hang things on. Things had become quiet. Those hundred and one background noises that aren't heard on a conscious level—the slap of the surf, insect buzzes, and wind whistling—were suddenly gone.



The gigantic sea serpent seemed intent on devouring  
at least one Ernie Stoffer.

With the belt across my legs, I stretched lazily, shutting my eyes to the sun's glare. When I opened them, there'd been some changes.

The sun wasn't even in sight. Clouds over the ocean were pink colored, but the sky and sea were dark blue. Had the look of . . . dawn.

I jumped up, suddenly very cold. I didn't feel crazy. Never had an hallucination, either.

I made it to the top of the cliff pretty fast. The characteristic, stunted, scrub brush was gone, and the wild grass was replaced by cultivated stuff. Bushes. Homes. Where before there'd been nothing, now there was six or seven big, California, ranch-style jobs up on the hill. Low, rambling, almost sprawling, with a nuance just barely perceptible: they were slightly less angular than those I was accustomed to, and there was more glass. The colors, in the early light, seemed brighter, more varied.

The ridge was still there, a familiar face. I stood on the edge of a wide two-lane road. Just opposite me was a driveway with mail-boxes, for homes on the hill. One of the boxes had a morning paper. I swiped it, hurried back to the beach.

I opened the paper, and the world smacked me in the face. Old friend of a masthead: San Francisco Chronicle. New shocker of a date: April 9, 1978. Big story about Lance Dana accompanying some dame to a

premiere, and getting into a fight. Movie star? Good—they still had those.

Then I collapsed, shaking from the reaction. What could I do? Nothing. All right, then find out something about this new world. Reading, I decided I'd rather be home.

The President, speaking to the American Labor Union, threatened Britain with "serious consequences" if subversive activities in this country weren't stopped. The USSR was growling at China, Yugoslavia.

Legislatures of Northern California and Southern California were considering reuniting the state.

Station manager shot selling black market gas; unemployment at a new low with CCC voluntary labor camps absorbing the surplus; next year, the transcontinental 8-lane superhighway would be completed. Four full pages of comic strips; the green-colored sports section was monstrously thick compared to that I read regularly.

Sick for myself, our Founding Fathers, and Steve Benét, I rose, glanced at my watch—12:48. I was still on my own time.

With complete shock, because I wasn't expecting it, tell-tale stillness descended.

I fell two feet, did a neat belly-flop into water, began swimming. There was a beach near; I rode the waves in.

The hills were low, rolling, and enough like the Coast Ranges to

make me hope I was home. There was vegetation, too.

On emerging, I didn't need a very close look. Short stuff, couple of inches high. At the top were arranged, more or less parallel, some rounded blobs. Spore-bearing organs. Gray-green.

Primitive as all hell.

Zosterophyllum, and what I'd have given to have a paleobotanist present to argue the name!

The things on the beach, too, shook me. Small, dead bodies lying around, like sand crabs after a storm, but bigger. Trilobites, extinct cousins of the crab.

Only they weren't extinct, just dead, and I'd had it good. I was somewhere in Silurian time, more than 300 million years behind where I wanted to be.

I sank to the sand, idly toying with the trilobites. I've never felt fear in quite that way. The kind that makes you twitch inside, with a parrot-cage taste in the mouth and a tennis ball in the throat. Stuck here, I'd be dead fast. Nature hadn't yet evolved an edible plant or animal.

Suddenly the ground began vibrating, and there was a heavy roar. Quake? I looked up the ridge: avalanche, coming fast! One chance—

A very large rock, about room size, was a few feet away. I threw myself behind it, just as the tons of debris hit.

The air filled with dust. The protecting boulder shook ominously, shifted a little. Big

chunks came flying over the top, landing close.

The boulder shifted farther, then stopped. Everything had stopped, including my heart, until I realized I was safe . . . and lucky—it was only a baby avalanche.

Memo to Ernie: Mother Nature can be pretty vicious in a mindless sort of way. Seemed as though the masses of rock were directed to me personally.

Up ahead there was a peculiar, dimly heard shuffling that might have been the rocks settling to equilibrium or the start of another fall. I looked around but saw nothing.

It was now 1:33. Another pattern occurred to me: the other shift happened in about 45 minutes. If that was right, things would be happening soon.

They did.

I was getting fed up with the whole works and, truthfully, just a bit indifferent. Time travel has that effect.

The sky was dull, and the clouds heavily laden. A fine mist was falling. I was on the shore of a lake. The country was humid, very reminiscent of Louisiana bayous. The trees in this swampy land were thick, the fern-dominated underbrush even thicker. Insects—a real dragonfly—buzzed and flitted busily, regardless of the drizzle.

I sat under a tree, tried to figure the score. I wasn't jumping through geologic periods in sequence; this relatively advanced tree proved it. Moving



forward in time, I began to hope I could get off the merry-go-round somewhere close to my own era. However, either I was moving in accelerated jumps, or a part of the pattern was still missing. I'd know soon.

I took a good look at the vegetation. Lovely textbook examples of 20-foot high Calamites grew all about the marshland country. Calamites, the scouring rush responsible for so much of our coal. I carefully noted the answer to the controversy of whether or not Calamites had chlorophyll.

Calamites meant this was the Carboniferous, but the span covered a lot of time. What part of the Carboniferous was it?

Right then I found out in a most unpleasant way.

There was a splash in the lake. Interested, I walked to the shore. Something like a palm frond approached. It grounded; a head emerged, dripping algal slime and dead leaves. Acutely massive, with a large, large mouth and sharp teeth. A 10-foot body slowly followed. On its back was a sail-like business, skin stretched over bones stuck upright three feet—my palm frond. The beast slowly crawled and slithered at me. The eyes were mean clear through. The mouth opened wide, making typical roaring motions—only no sound came.

I stood unmoving, in simple fascination. Our restorations are beautifully correct: Dimetrodon, a flesh-eating reptile of the

Permian, probable ancestor of the mammals.

By then, he was a few yards distant, advancing with the same determination—to try *my* flesh. Keeping it in the family is OK, but this mammalian ancestor was far removed . . . exactly what I should be.

Whirling, skidding, slipping in the mud. I finally made it back, to discover Permian trees weren't built for climbing. I couldn't get a foothold, and my unworshipped ancestor was closer. In desperation, I drove my hammer into the bark, reached a crotch about six feet up.

Treed by a Dimetrodon! Bulls often forced me to climb—even once an amorous steer—but when a 200-million-year dead reptile turned the trick, it became ridiculous. The frustrated beast was tenacious, didn't leave. From where I sat, the lake shore was visible. The ground had been disturbed, criss-crossed with trails, as though something had been dragged about. Stillness; the shift.

I didn't fall far. Couldn't see where I landed; it was a pitch-black night. The sky was sprinkled with a completely unfamiliar pattern of stars.

Suddenly, to my right, there was a bright orange glare. Seeing now, I was on a plain below a high mountain range. Flame was thrown upward in a volcanic eruption. Moments later, dull thuds, the noise of the explosion. Seven to ten miles. Too close.

I tried, and failed, to see my watch. Last thing I needed then was to know the time; yet an idea was forming.

A thin, white stream crept from the crater. Splashed, broke into rivulets, reformed wider, dulled to red. Some distance in front, there were sudden puffs of fire. Trees, ignited by the heat. Voraciously, the stream consumed them; others on the flanks flared, burned until swept up by the constantly widening molten river.

The air grew hot, the first ashes fell. So did a good sized rock that damn near hit me. Dangerous—a volcanic block, thrown out during the eruption.

It was time to move, but what way? Direction? My Brunton compass . . . Geomagnetic lines of force were still present—still? I walked north, nervous north, momentarily expecting more blocks. But the shift began; it startled me, for the interval hadn't seemed 45 minutes.

I sank into water, rolled onto my back. An ocean with no land in sight. Salt spray whipped my eyes. There was a high wind blowing, and the sea was heavy.

This was to be a fight. Gone were any thoughts of wondering where and when I was. The only objectivity of which I was capable—that with clarity—was survival.

I tried floating to conserve strength. Boots were heavy and water-logged; I managed to get them off. I'd keep my belt and

hammer until it became literally sink or swim.

My chances seemed very slim, emaciated. I had to avoid drowning. I had to stay in roughly the same spot: miss the shift, and I was dead.

Never was there a longer time. Waves slapped me around as though I were a ping-pong ball. I shipped water through the nose, mouth, and ears.

I began discarding things, and first was my objectivity. Instinct took over. I shed the compass. Canteens. Map case. Next, my stereoscope. Everything in my pockets except wallet and car keys.

The storm grew worse. I stuck the hammer in my pants belt, shoved the first-aid kit in my shirt, unhooked the web belt. That was almost the end; in near-hysteria, I remembered my desire to be near the ocean got me into this mess.

Suddenly, the pelagic terror was over—and a new one began. I was still in water, but it was calm. A large island appeared, couple of hundred feet away. Dog-tired, I quickly made for it, unknowingly saved my life.

I'd covered more than half the distance, when I saw a monstrosity approaching from the opposite direction. It was straight from the legends: sea serpent.

Sinuous, sleek, it rolled through water with hideous efficiency. Its head was beaked, its jaws elongated and filled with razor-sharp teeth.

The head emerged with the 15-

foot body, strung out behind. The creature swam through the water like a snake moves on land. The most rapacious pirate to swim a Cretaceous sea: a mosasaur.

My arms were lead; my back and leg muscles ached intolerably. Stubbornness kept me swimming; stubbornness and a wild, unreasonable anger at the fate which put me here. The mosasaur approached from right angles; stubbornness and anger were no longer adequate. I couldn't swim anymore.

Miraculously, I touched ground, about 30 yards out, began a half-wade, half-swim toward land. The creature caught up in chest-high water.

He circled, teeth wet and glistening in the sunlight. Hammer held high, I turned with him, cautiously. Footing was insecure; the water buoyed me up, off balance. Fortunately, the mosasaur was also hampered in such shallow water, lacking maneuvering space.

He came in fast, made a pass. I dodged, not quite enough. My left arm was opened from wrist to bicep.

He banked, came at me dead on, mouth wide open. Backing up, I reached shallower water, and my arms were free.

I aimed, swung with my last reserve. The sharp point of the hammer penetrated, sank deep into the beast's left eye. Blood geysered out in spurts; the hammer was yanked from my hand. Waves from the thrashing of the

mosasaur knocked me off my feet.

I was up instantly, running-wading in a sticky mass of cement. Made it to the shore safely, fell to the sand, remembered:

looking at my arm, wondering what happened.

spilling iodine from the first-aid kit over the wound, somehow bandaging it.

giggling thanks to the professor who always said to lose pants before hammer.

fumbling for ammonia bombs.

I don't remember passing out: when I came to, the smell of ammonia was still in my nostrils. My arm throbbed, but the bleeding had stopped.

Thirst was a problem; my canteens were lost in the sea. Looking about for springs, I saw things that should have been investigated, but I was dehydrated and thought only of water.

Up the beach, at the water's edge, was a curious pile of driftwood. Curious, because there wasn't any other driftwood about; because it didn't have the configuration of ordinary driftwood.

Curiouser and curiouser: between the driftwood and me, the beach sand had been disturbed, as though a seabee in a cat had come by.

I crossed the dense foliage ringing the beach, walked north, and shifted again.

Now I was sure the standard

interval hadn't elapsed. I raised a foot from a sandy beach and lowered it on grass. Tall, needing mowing, but real *grass*! The area was wooded, but thinned eastward onto a plain. Somewhere behind came the roar of breakers.

It was now 5:10 P.M. Amazing the watch still ran—but then, it *was* nonmagnetic, shock-proof, and waterproof.

A fauna sported on the plain—oreodonts, cameloids, titanothers and that armored car, Teleoceras, the rhinoceros. This was the Miocene—despite the titanothers—only 20 million years from home.

I wandered north, keeping within the forested area. The animals on the plain were all herbivorous, but I'd no desire to be investigated by some lumbering hulk. The vegetation changed, and I found a cool, clear stream. No poet has ever done a stream justice!

I raised a doused, dripping face, when sated, did a second take at the trees. A grove of persea—avocado, if you forgot basic botany. Large luscious golden-green fruit hung bountifully—couldn't have looked or tasted better in the Garden of Eden.

I even had leisure to think about the mechanics of time shifting. The best I could do was a big meteor hitting the California coast on April 9, 1978. Enough mass-conversion-energy to breach the space-time continuum. By analogy, the rupture's waves diminish backward,

and the wave crests are in contact. At the break, the lip—as a hole sloppily punched in sheet metal—bends under and touches the last crest. Complicated, but it explained why I went once into the future, then slid back in time along the lip and came forward again. Surfboarding in the breakers of time!

I stopped once more to pick up some sturdy, underbrush vines and wind several lengths around my middle. Watered, fed, feeling decent, I knew that if the theory was correct, I'd have to commit murder.

Somewhere ahead came a sort of animal squealing that died out suddenly. Reminded of the violence that was possible, I was relieved when, on revised schedule, the shift began.

The raucous scolding of a gull, waves gently hitting the shore. A cliff. The sun almost directly overhead. Smell of salt.

I was home.

No time for emotion; the theory had to be tested. Quickly I walked past the declivity I'd climbed down originally, continued northward to some large rocks and settled down.

Call it insanity. I wanted another crack at the brass ring, another ride on the crazy carousel.

Anyway, I had to kill.

I saw myself amble down to the beach. Ernie Stoffer, that's who.

A shock, despite my expecting it.

Then I faded out.

I, not him. Just the way I'd doped it; even so, I had strong misgivings about this step. Not only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun.

On the beach in 1978 again, I waited behind the same rocks. Sure enough, about five minutes later, the other one appeared and raced to the top of the cliff.

Curiosity dragged me back. I examined the web belt left behind. Confusion! The belt seemed identical to the one I'd had. If it was, what had happened to mine? The canteens, too, seemed the same. They had to be. Or did they?

The hell with metaphilosophy, I thought while taking a long pull from a canteen, *he* won't be using this water. The same water that *I*—

Trying not to think, I returned to hiding. Relaxed as much as possible to conserve strength for the rough time ahead. My arm began aching.

Some of this was clear. The time-shift was not simultaneous but spread north to south at a measurable rate, like primary elastic waves from an earthquake's epicenter. The "wave" moved in a straight line, covering roughly 100 feet in five minutes. As long as I stayed far enough north, I had sufficient lead time over him . . . me?

I could have gone up and introduced myself to myself, but the thought of compounding a paradox was a little frightening.

He'd been reading the paper for some time. I shifted again.

Another complication—previous position had some bearing on the new landing. I was on the Silurian beach.

I watched him swim ashore, saw the hope fade. He sank to the beach and began to get the glimmerings of my earlier idea.

From behind, there came an odd sort of shuffling and clicking. Chilled, I turned. The thing was a few feet away. Insects, in the broad sense of the word, don't ordinarily bother me. This one was over seven feet long.

Not a true insect, the thing, an eurypterid, had a body like an inverted wine bottle composed of transverse chitinous plates. It dragged itself on jointed, spider legs under its head. A couple of flippers, for swimming, stuck out behind the legs. What stuck out in front worried me.

Claws for pinching, over a foot long, with enough power to break a man's arm—my arm. Those claws made the clicking noise. Fortunately, nature had not yet evolved an efficient land predator. The eurypterid moved slowly.

Desperately, while the guy down the beach felt sorry for himself, I searched for a defense. Thank God for erosion! Big hunks of rock were close by; I bowled them at the legs, convinced the man-sized sea-scorpion to go home. Once in the water, he disappeared fast.

And then came the silence.

Nothing had changed in the Permian. I picked a spot by the



shore of the lake, and waited for him.

Only one of the things that bothered me was my reference to "him." Ignoring grammar, he was me. Or, me was he. Another internal philosophical wrangle loomed; I adopted a purely ego-centric but unsatisfactory concept: I was I, and he was he.

I had other things to think about, to do. To avoid spending 45 terrible minutes in the open sea, I gathered most of the driftwood in the immediate area. It wasn't enough. Casting about for more, I wandered down to the lake shore and found what I needed. I'd saved the vines around my middle for a raft.

He was busy avoiding the Dimetrodon; I ignored the interchange. Once was enough. Besides, my materials were something to cause wonder.

I, dweller of 200-million years hence, was tying pieces of wood, known only as fossils, with vines that wouldn't grow for 170 million years. All to save my life in 100 million years.

Resisting the temptation to take the easy way out and go schizophrenic, I finished the raft, shifted into the darkness of the plain. In a few more minutes, he was going to tumble from a tree in the Permian, having stared at the strange marks on the lake shore.

Good Lord!

My marks, when I went for wood.

All right, I'd been dumb. Now it all came flooding back: the

marks I'd seen when treed . . . the driftwood on the Cretaceous beach, my raft that I'd just built . . .

I'd have to move faster because he would soon walk north, cutting down our time differential. Sure, there's nothing new under the sun. Sure, somebody had done it all before me. Me! He, too, called himself "I," and thought of me as "he."

Somebody who had me staked out for the kill, just as I had the man behind.

How to refer to my time-flanking companions? I was I. The one ahead of me would simply have the undignified appellation, X. I'd be Y, and the man behind, of course, must be Z.

Trouble was, X must have had the same thought right here, and called the guy before *him* X, and me, Z. Another squirrel cage to avoid—

A new factor, X. Might even now be planning my death. Had I been preceded? There was no evidence. If still in the daisy-chain, X wasn't leaving traces. The thought of going through one more time gave me the willies.

Something else did, too. I hadn't died; X had been unsuccessful; must still be trying. As *I would have to be!* X, Y, and Z travel at rates of 100 megayears per hour, and if two of the three are simply imitations, which twin has the Toni?

I shook my head. X was trying to kill me—but he couldn't

succeed. I was trying to kill Z—but I couldn't succeed!

It would be only a short time before I discovered how wrong I could be, especially about X, ahead.

The volcanic display began again. Lovely and primitive: raw, flaming, molten lava pouring down. I paid no attention, for the next shift was the oceanic one. Yet, the me before me had made it. The idea gave me confidence in the . . . the future.

Tied the raft loosely to my body, so that I could get out if the thing flipped over. I heisted it onto my back, walked north. Soon Z would so walk and be surprised the shift hadn't taken a full 45 minutes.

My entry into the sea was anything but gentle. I hit hard, hurt hard, sank several feet, finally came to the surface.

Conditions were no better. Waves were still big and the wind strong, but the raft made all the difference. I gripped it tightly and sweated things out. Maybe I was a hypocrite, but all my sympathy went out to Z behind; I knew what he had to take.

Finally, the waves stopped their beating and the island appeared with the breathless suddenness of a shift. There was a moment of panic; the mosasaur was nearby. Still, the one ahead *had* reached the shore without mishap, so I paddled fast.

I don't know when Z appeared. I got rid of the raft, scrambled

inland. From the underbrush, I watched the fight. The outcome had to be, and I did want Z dead; suddenly I was rooting for him. At that moment, if I'd had a weapon, I'd have helped, regardless of consequences. Damn it, the underdog was someone closer than a brother.

He took care of himself, of course, striking perfectly into the beast's right eye.

*Right eye?*

The terrible significance came home to roost, gibbering at me—or was it a Bronx cheer? Z and X were again my enemies. I'd hit the mosasaur in its left eye. The last of the puzzle fell into place.

Fell into place: fell, fall, rock fall. *There'd been none for Z in the Silurian. There was no rigidity to the time worlds!*

X had almost killed me when he tried. The avalanche. And no wonder there'd been only one volcanic block. X had thrown it.

The Ernie ahead obviously was better at murder than I. Hadn't so much as bothered Z; but I could, given the chance.

It came when Z crawled out of the water, fumbled for his first-aid kit, bandaged his arm, passed out. I strode from the brush, wondering why the hell X hadn't gotten me when I lay there.

I'd been living in a fool's paradise. Danger was still present—had been, ever since I set foot on this treadmill. I'd gone along the second trip in blind confidence, never realizing something gruesome could happen.

It did.

I suppose a traveler couldn't spend much time in the Cretaceous without bumping into the natives.

As I approached Z, the brush suddenly gave way under the push of a 20-foot dinosaurian bulk. He wasn't big as dinosaurs go — a poor comparison. Standing on four legs, he turned head and neck first toward me, then the prone figure.

No mean feat turning head and neck—they were a third his length. The neck ended in a long, sweeping, bony frill. Two sharp horns over his eyes, stub of one over the mouth. The upper jaw curved down to a beak over the lower. His skin, elephant-like, hung in folds all over the body.

Alas, poor Ernie! I knew him well: Triceratops. And I froze when he appeared, even though he was a vegetarian.

Slowly, with massive tail lashing the sand and head cocked to one side, he turned directly to me. The head cocked in the other direction. The tail humped up, slammed down on the coral sand. Here was what caused the disturbance I'd compared to a sea-bee-and-cat on my first trip. In terms of raw power, it was a good analogy.

He couldn't see me too well; ancient reptiles hadn't stereoscopic vision. Then the Triceratops turned to look at Z.

I jumped back to the bush. But you can't ever predict what a dinosaur will do. He bellowed once, followed immediately.

Really wasn't bad. I zigged,

zagged, confused hell out of him. The stupid beast, a plains-dweller rather than a jungle creature, showed poorly.

Turning north, I finally lost him, came back to my starting point and shifted.

Still breathing hard, I emerged in the Miocene. Where was X? I wasn't sure he'd made a third trip, or even survived the second. But if X hadn't made it, that didn't mean I couldn't. Simply keep out of trouble the next 45 minutes—less, now. Unfortunately, less-than-45-minutes can be a lifetime.

I had to get rid of the man behind, and this was my last chance. But what if something happened to me? It would leave Z a clear field to—

To what? Go back over the course and watch the guy following him? Madness. I paused a few minutes beside the stream, even longer north of the avocado grove; he'd stop there a while. I stood near a thick growth of vines that looked familiar. Could this be where his ideas were to come to fruition, where I'd picked my vines?

There was no time to mull it over. He started again. Now quick action was necessary. The wooded area ended abruptly, and I had trouble. If I went out to the plain, he'd be sure to see me. What the devil had happened?

I heard him whistling, the very soul of caution. There was no choice: I had to go north, hoping I could do something be-

fore the shift occurred. I walked into the open.

Skirting the brush on my right were three or four pig-like, pig-sized animals that looked annoyingly familiar. If I could stampede them toward my traveling companion, I might get the business done. Scooping up some large rocks, I ran toward the animals and threw.

Mistake.

They were the young; that was why the form had seemed only familiar. They retreated, but reserves filled the gap, then advanced. The parents: travesty on pigs, ugliest looking things I'd ever seen.

These could enjoy roast man with an apple in his mouth. A half-ton or more, they stood six feet at the shoulder; their heads were over a yard long. The eyes were small, close together; a mane-like frill ran from forehead to the middle of the back. A bony projection extended from the jaws, effecting horribly puffed cheeks, as if there were built-in medicine balls.

That was what I faced: two symphonies in horror called Dinohyus, a genus soon to become extinct. But not soon enough for me.

They had the temper of wild boar. Quickly the nearer charged. There was no place to hide. I did the only possible thing—dodge. The beast roared by, a D Jag at turn one.

I'd forgotten the second, coming under a full head of steam from a different angle. For bulky

animals, these moved fast. I dodged the second, also; but, trying to run, I stepped in a hole, dropped, sprawling heavily.

The first circled back, head close to the ground, squealing nastily. I was through, could never get out of the way.

Too late, I knew what the noise was I heard on the first trip. Too late, I knew I'd never had to kill Z.

The ground shook with the approach of the charging animal. The monstrous hulk was nearly at me. Suddenly, I was shifting, but it was literally a race against time.

Time won.

The Dinohyus faded out just as its front legs were dropping on my chest.

I couldn't move. Shock. Gentle waves washed me. A few feet away, a wonderful cliff. Home.

Trembling, exhausted, I hugged the sand. Until I realized that Z would appear any second.

Somehow, despite weakness and dizziness, I made it up the cliff. I ran, crazily, erratically, until it had to be safe. Then I dropped under a nice, normal Bay tree, and luxuriated in a stable, nonshifting world.

The sky was different, had more clouds than when I'd first reached the beach. It was really just a few minutes past noon, though my watch showed 11:12. I'd aged 11 hours in five minutes. What I didn't know was that I was two days younger.

And that's how a man wan-

dered through evolutionary time trying to kill himself—no, his other selves. Even so, I ask that you don't kill me, at least until we talk it over. You realize by now I tried to stampede the Dinohyus, tried to kill you. You are my Z, and I, your X. However, *there can't, mustn't, be anyone behind you!*

Despite the fallacy inherent in time travel, the laws of conservation still hold. After the meteor breaks the continuum, there will be enough energy reconverted into mass to establish no more than two alternate, possible, *unstable* universes—three total: the real one and two might-have-been's. X and I haven't met, but we're agreed on the total.

We three return to this particular world. Why didn't we meet as we emerged from the second trip? I postulate a frictional time energy with a positive charge built up as you travel—what the hell kind of terminology is used for this stuff? Likes repel: we all tried to come out together, and the charge booted us back into sequence, hours behind one another and *two days before each of us climbed down to the beach originally.*

X tried to kill me, and I you, for the same reason. Each believes he's from the real universe. When the energy collapse comes, and the two alternates cease to exist, each of us hopes to survive. The alternates are not self-sustaining, implicit in the

conservation laws. We can ignore one another, gambling on 3-to-1 odds. But there's a better way, if we work together.

The car was gone by the time I'd pulled myself together; X, the first out, had driven it back to San Francisco. I took some time to return here to my . . . our apartment, and you'll take longer. I'm leaving X's note with my account. Points up our differences — and similarities. We're different enough to be interesting and alike enough to form a fine team.

The checkbook is badly depleted, but X figured it down to the line. Look at the invoices; three of all the items, but we've each taken our share. Camping equipment, the .45, the rubber raft and carbon dioxide inflation bottles, and the lead ingot. He's taken the camera and color film; who'd believe mosasaurs are orange-green?

You'll also see the open textbook on the table. X underlined certain passages, added exclamation points. He found it strange that Trilobites became extinct at the end of the Permian. I don't, and because we return to this world, perhaps it and I are real.

Together, we'll all go through twice more, dropping as much junk as possible from the real world into the phonies—one reason for the lead ingot. If one meteor can supply enough energy to create two entire but unstable universes, not much real matter is needed to sustain two extra



humans. When the collapse comes, the real matter in the probability worlds will be converted into the necessary mass-energy state.

We're banking on that, to save the two nearly real Ernies. Hope there's enough stuff to give us two more chrono-go-rounds.

I'm very anxious to meet you two of me, to win against Nature. Think what we can do:

rob a bank and have an unshakable alibi. Or, if we could be honest and each work one week out of three. As for women . . .

The perfect brother act, that's us. So get moving! You must be there before noon.

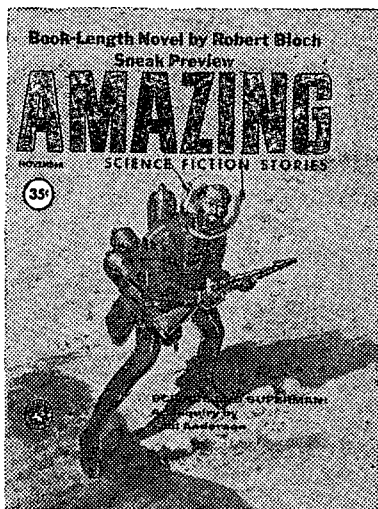
Only one thing bothers me. When you appear, what happens if X and I have misfigured?

If a fourth drops in for bridge?

**THE END**

## COMING NEXT MONTH

**Everybody's favorite, BOB BLOCH, will be back again with another explosive, imaginative novel.**



This one, called *Sneak Preview*, is a fast-moving tale of psychoanalysis, Hollywood blondes and bigwigs, an unprincipled autocracy, and a few assorted surprises. It's one of Bloch's best.

A running-mate for issue honors is a rare fact article. *Science & Superman: An Inquiry*, by **Poul Anderson**, is a stimulating and controversial essay that needs to be read. One guarantee: you may not like what Anderson says, but you will be burning to argue with him.

**Jack Sharkey** has another of his unique short stories in the November issue, a deft tale of a puffed-up

general with a new weapon which is marvelous, except for one *Minor Detail*.

**For all this, plus several other short stories and all our usual features, be sure to read the November issue of *AMAZING*, on sale October 8. Reserve a copy with your newsdealer now.**

*He was supposed to capture the  
imagination of a people. But it  
wasn't until the people captured  
his that he became*

# THE MOST IMPORTANT MAN IN THE WORLD

By DARIUS JOHN GRANGER

**A**NXIOUSLY, but trying to hide his nervousness behind a show of professional enthusiasm, Dr. Carl Maddon led his guests into the starkly furnished office.

"We do our monitoring from here, gentlemen," he said.

The Senator nodded vigorously; the general moved his chin a half inch to show he had heard Maddon's words. "You watch them all the time?" the Senator asked. He was a big red-faced man with a mane of white hair which almost made him look the stereotype of the U. S. Senator. Actually, Maddon knew, he was a big man in Washington, the Chairman of the Joint Committee for Space Rockets, and an astute investigator. The general, who wore four stars on the shoulder of his tunic, said nothing.

"Well, we don't watch them all the time," Maddon said. "But we could. And of course, movies are constantly taken."

The Senator sat down in front of the three blank monitoring screens; the general remained standing. The Senator asked, "What part of their training takes place here, Dr. Maddon? What do they do here?"

Maddon's grin was bleak. "Mostly, they wait."

For the first time the general spoke. "I beg your pardon?" he said. He was a lean man, not yet fifty years old, the Chief of Staff of the Joint Co-ordinated Space Program. It would take a great deal to surprise him, Maddon thought a little ruefully, but he looked surprised now . . . as if, perhaps, he had misunderstood.

"We consider it their most important test," Maddon explained.

"They've been here for ninety days now—"

"Doing *nothing*?" blurted the Senator.

"That's right, sir. Nothing—or, everything. Because whichever one of them goes up there will spend most of his time being lonely." He repeated, "Whichever one goes," and thought that was rather clever, since it took his visitors' minds off the lack of activity which they seemed to find so deplorable. It stirred another bone of contention, however, and he regretted it almost at once.

"It will be the man chosen by the Joint Committee, of course. Won't it, Doctor?" the Senator said. "Because, obviously, Parker's the best man."

The general smiled a thin smile. "Oh, I don't know," he said. "The way I heard it, Captain Caruthers—the military choice—had the best reflexes of all of 'em."

"That he did," Maddon admitted.

"See? Then it's settled," the general almost barked.

"Parker scored highest in the psychological tests, General," the Senator pointed out. "Didn't he, Dr. Maddon?"

"Yes, he did," Maddon said.

The Senator and the general stared at each other. Maddon didn't say anything else.

"What the Joint Committee was looking for—and what we found in Parker," the Senator said proudly, "—was the truly

well-rounded young man, quite sane, not at all neurotic, emotionally mature and balanced. So what if your Captain Caruthers had an iota or two of superior reflexes? They aren't the whole story by a long shot. Are they, Maddon?"

"No," Maddon said agreeably.

The general smiled faintly. The Senator said, "See here, Maddon. You agree with everything both of us say."

Maddon shrugged. "Caruthers does have the best reflexes. Parker is the best adjusted. I agree with you because you both told the truth."

"Then who's going?" the Senator wanted to know. "Who's going up there?"

Maddon said: "Suppose we look at the monitors, gentlemen."

The Senator nodded enthusiastically, settling comfortably in his chair. The general stood at ease, hands clasped behind his back, shoulders squared. At a signal from Maddon, a technician behind a glass panel in the wall went to work. At once the first of the three monitor screens went on. A clean-cut young man could be seen seated at a desk, busily writing what seemed to be a letter.

"Hello, Parker," Maddon said. The Senator made a brief pleased clucking sound in his throat. On the monitor screen, Parker looked up and smiled pleasantly. It was hard to realize, Maddon thought, that the fate of the Western world might well rest

on the decision which had, before the arrival of the Senator and the general, already been made in this room.

"Hello there, Dr. Maddon," Parker said.

"What did you do today?" Maddon asked.

The image on the screen leaned back from the desk and raised a hand in mock despair. "Nothing much," he said, grinning. "There's never anything to do around here."

"Well-adjusted to any situation, you see?" the Senator said happily.

Maddon asked: "What were you doing right now, when we tuned in on you?"

"Writing a letter to my girl, sir," Parker said. "If I'm chosen—well, I won't be seeing her for a long time. I figure I ought to write her whenever I can. I have the time to write now."

"Commendable," muttered the Senator. "Most commendable."

"Do you miss anything in particular?" Maddon asked.

Parker replied at once, vigorously: "People! I get pretty bored with only myself for company."

"A clean-cut, clean-living extrovert," said the Senator. "What did I tell you?"

On the monitor screen, Parker grinned. "It looks like I have a rooting section," he said.

Maddon grinned back at him, thanked him, and told him he might get back to his letter. The first monitor screen faded. As the second one began to glow,

the general leaned forward with eagerness.

On the second screen a young man in khakis and T-shirt was pressing a bar-bell over his head, his face straining with effort.

"Afternoon, Captain," Maddon said.

Captain Caruthers eased the heavy bar-bell to the floor and mopped at his face with a towel. "Hi, Doc," he said.

"How's it been going today?"

Captain Caruthers shrugged. "So-so," he said. "Kind of lonely, but parties and stuff like that with a lot of people were never my strong point. I can do without 'em."

"Man would have to, up there," the general pointed out *soto vocce*. "That's what's wrong with your Parker, Senator: he misses *people*," he said so.

"I see you've been exercising," Maddon told Caruthers.

"Got to, the way I see it. Holed up in here, a man can grow stale."

"He's right," the general said with curt enthusiasm.

"So that's what you've been doing today," Maddon asked, "exercising?"

"Right, sir."

Maddon asked his apparently innocent question. "Do you miss anything in particular?"

Caruthers thought for a moment. "Well, if I had to name one single thing, it would be—getting out and stretching my legs."

"Thanks, Captain," Maddon said. "Be seeing you."

"Stretching his legs," the general said approvingly. "That's the normal reaction, isn't it? The ideal reaction, cooped up like that? In a little two-by-four room on top of this crazy mountain of yours, Dr. Maddon?"

The Senator snorted. "The stretching of his legs, general? How's he going to do that—up there?"

The general didn't say anything, but his face turned almost as red as the Senator's.

Maddon told them both: "There you have it, gentlemen. You've given me the answer yourselves: Parker is well-rounded, but he's too much of an extrovert to be the first space-man. Caruthers does have tremendous reflexes and is a fine physical specimen, but he'd be too cramped in a man-made moon not much bigger than the room he's spent the last ninety days in. Gentlemen, I don't have to tell you how important this decision is. But, if you need a reminder—"

He turned to the opposite wall of the room, which was covered with a mercator projection of the Earth. On the map, wavy lines went around the planet. "Gentlemen," he said, using a pointer, "the black lines are Russian—Sputniks two, three, four and five. Circling the Earth. Hovering. Watching us. The two red lines are our own moons. Four to two, gentlemen. And Sputnik

Five is bigger than anything we've been able to send up. The Russians say Sputnik Six, when launched, will join Five in its orbit. I don't have to tell you what that means."

"The beginning of a true space station," the general said.

"But what I don't understand, Dr. Maddon," the Senator protested, "is if the Reds can do it, why can't we?"

Maddon grinned a flat grin. "Who said we can't?"

"Then—"

"That's the purpose of our program, gentlemen. Now, although the Russians can't match our technology, they did manage to get their first Sputniks into space ahead of us. That surprised the heck out of the world. But it needn't have. For the Russians, operating a dictatorship, can concentrate their effort in a way we cannot in a free society." Maddon added grimly: "They proved that with their Sputniks."

The Senator asked, somewhat indignantly: "Then are we doomed forever to—to second-rate imitations of their achievements?"

Dr. Maddon shook his head at once. "We're a free society," he said. "We have something they lack. We have free men. We have individuality."

"I don't see—" began the Senator.

"I'll tell you. The Reds could find an Ivan somewhere with the well-roundedness of Parker. They could find an Ivan as well-

co-ordinated and physically perfect as Caruthers. But, gentlemen I put it to you: Could they find, anywhere in their vast totalitarian country a truly free, unshackled individual, self-assured, self-assertive—yet able to sublimate his individuality to the good of the whole because he *wants* to?"

"I'm not sure I understand you," the Senator admitted.

"They couldn't find such a man, Senator," Maddon explained. "In a dictatorship, he just doesn't exist. But," he went on eagerly, "we *have* been able to find such a man. At least, we here on the Mountain think so. We've found him and he's the answer to the Russians. He's the hope of free mankind."

"Parker!" said the Senator.

"Caruthers!" said the general.

"Jeremy Budd," said Dr. Maddon quietly.

"Budd!" gasped the Senator and general in unison.

Maddon went on, as if he hadn't heard their outraged surprise, "Aside from winning the lead in the rocket race back for our side, we have to do something else, gentlemen. We have to find someone who can—well, who can deservedly capture the world's imagination for us. Parker and Caruthers are nice boys. That's why they're here. But they couldn't do it."

"Couldn't do what?" asked the Senator.

"Capture the world's imagination as it must be captured. Be-

cause we'll never win that particular phase of the cold war through the ordinary propaganda mediums."

"That's preposterous," said the Senator. "Why, our Information Program . . ."

"Is very good, with its understandable limitations," said Maddon. "In the first place, we're confronted with one ironic disadvantage: we tell the truth, and the enemy tells lies. Lies, gentlemen, which appeal to the fickle imagination of mankind in a way that simple, unvarnished truth never can. In the second place, their best copy writers work for their Propaganda agencies—while ours, and rightly so in a free society, I suppose, are busy concocting clever little jingles telling you which toothpaste to buy and which car to drive and which girl your wife ought to dress like and . . ."

"But Jeremy Budd!" protested the Senator.

The general said, "Isn't he that—that artist fellow you scientists brought up here? Who couldn't make out in his own chosen field?"

"If he really had a chosen field. And you must admit, gentlemen, we didn't select Jeremy Budd to enter the competition with Caruthers and Parker because he was one of us: Budd is no scientist."

"You can say that again," chuckled the Senator.

"But he's a man. A free, seeking, striving, imaginative, confused, loving, hating, fearing,



questing young man who has, in the tests and here in the ninety days of waiting on the Mountain, proven himself to be the best man both to go up in the first manned satellite and to recapture the world's imagination for us."

The Senator and the general looked at each other doubtfully. The Senator managed a wry smile. "I take it that third monitor will show us this—this paragon, Dr. Maddon?"

Maddon nodded. "Watch," he said, and waved his hand. The technician adjusted a dial, and monitor three began to glow. "Here are our hopes, gentlemen," said Dr. Maddon. "Here are our dreams. Here is our future."

The screen cleared. It showed a small sparsely furnished room like those which had housed Caruthers and Parker. There was a cot, a desk, a straight-backed chair and a metal wardrobe. The room was perhaps fifteen by fifteen feet.

The room was empty.

Dr. Maddon's face turned white. "I—I don't—" he began.

"Don't understand?" smiled the Senator. "It's easy. Your paragon couldn't even take the waiting period, Doctor. Maybe Caruthers and Parker have their faults, but at least they're still here. Well?"

Instead of answering, Maddon went to a small voice-box on a desk in the office. "Hello!" he shouted. "Get me the gate."

"Main gate," a voice said in a moment.

"Did anybody leave here today? Anybody at all?"

"Yes, sir. I have his name here someplace—here it is. Man named Jeremy Budd checked out through here at 0300 this afternoon."

"Why?"

"No reason given, sir. Anyone's free to come and go. Those are the orders."

"Your bird," said the Senator, while the general nodded, "has flown the coop."

Under the circumstances, Maddon could do nothing but nod his head slowly and sadly.

Jeremy Budd entered a bar and grill on the main street of Satellite Station at the foot of the Mountain.

The town was small, new, almost antiseptically clean. It had been built in order to supply the Mountain with its needs. It was no older than the United States' all out effort to put a man in space, and it was brassy and bright and much too expensive like any new town anywhere.

"I'll have a beer," Jeremy Budd told the bar girl.

"New around here, aintcha?"

"No."

"Gosh! Then you must be down off the Mountain."

"You guessed it," Jeremy said.

"They go up," the girl said, looking surprised. "But they don't come down. Amazing. You're the first one I've seen."

Jeremy grinned at her. "That

is nothing. You're the first girl I've seen in three months. What's your name? Mine's Jeremy?"

"Phyllis. I'll get your beer, Jeremy."

She drew it from the tap while Jeremy watched. It was late and the bar was almost ready to close. Jeremy was the only customer. He watched the small neat motions Phyllis made as she drew his beer, set the glass on the bar, wiped off the foam with a bar stick. She was not a beautiful girl. She was somewhere in that broad range between severely plain and fairly pretty which included probably sixty percent of all the young girls in the country. She smiled when she brought the beer back. Jeremy smiled her smile.

"What's it like up there, Jeremy? Or is it a secret?"

"The part I'm involved in is no secret. Been sitting on my duff for three months."

"You're kidding me."

"No." Jeremy drank half his beer. "Umm, that's good."

"But what's all the fuss about that place if you don't do anything up there?"

"Never mind about me. I know all about me. I'm sick and tired of knowing about me." Jeremy drank the rest of his beer. "Tell me about Satellite Station."

"Say, are you AWOL or something?"

"It isn't a military base. There's no such thing as AWOL." Jeremy looked at his

glass. "I'll have another. Join me?"

"Well, thanks."

They drank their beers together. She's nice, Jeremy decided. The heck with me for this one night. The heck with me and that stinking Mountain. If they don't like it, that's tough.

"Doing anything after you close?" he asked.

"It's nearly one o'clock. What do you think I'd be doing?"

"Well, then, are you tired?"

"No. Not especially."

"Then take a walk with me," Jeremy said impulsively. "Show me around Satellite Station. I want to see if I like it."

"You mean if you do you won't go back up there?"

Jeremy gave her a surprised look. "Why did you say that?" he asked.

"I don't know. You look sort of confused. Tending a bar, you get to know when a guy is mixed up, I guess. You are wondering about going back up there, aren't you?"

Phyllis got out from behind the bar after washing their glasses. Jeremy didn't answer her right away, but watched her pull down the shades and prepare to shut the place for the night. Finally he said:

"Three months alone—maybe it's too long. You get to thinking."

"About yourself, you mean?"

"There's that. But also about this crazy mixed up world and how you fit in."

Phyllis looked at him. "You're a funny guy. I think maybe I'll take that walk with you after all. I live on Hill Street, if you know where that is. We could go the long way around."

"Don't look at me," Jeremy said as they went outside and Phyllis locked the door. "I don't know one street from another in Satellite Station."

"What was your job up there, anyhow, Jeremy?" Phyllis asked. "Or is it a military secret?"

"It's no secret, I guess. I was one of three guys chosen to be tested to see which one of us should go up with the first manned space station."

Phyllis said one word. She said, "Wow!"

Jeremy grinned. "I don't know. I can't help thinking they made a mistake. There's nothing special about me."

They turned the corner and kept walking. Although the bar Phyllis worked in was shut for the night, many others weren't. They passed a doorway from which music drifted out. There was laughter inside.

"Want to?" Jeremy asked impulsively.

"Oh, boy. A busman's holiday yet."

"I'm sorry."

"No. That's selfish of me. It's your night out. Come on."

Phyllis took Jeremy's hand and he led her inside. The place was a small nightclub, and crowded. They went past the bar and a waiter with a menu under

his arm ushered them to a small table across the room from the bandstand. A four-piece band was playing and a girl in a slinky dress was singing about her satellite lover.

"The way they commercialize on it," Jeremy said.

It didn't seem to bother Phyllis. "Well, my gosh, what did you expect?"

"Feeling the way I do, I guess I don't have a right to expect anything. Drink?"

"I don't mind if I do."

Jeremy ordered two tall drinks, and they toasted to each other. Phyllis asked: "What were you, before they selected you, I mean. A scientist? An engineer? A jet pilot?"

Jeremy grinned ruefully. "I thought I was an artist."

"An artist?" Phyllis repeated the word in surprise.

"I just thought I was. None of my work was ever bought. I did all kinds of odd jobs on the side. And read everything I could get my hands on."

"Then how would you know how to handle—one of those things up there, if you've never done that sort of thing?"

"Oh, they taught me that. That isn't the hard part. Being yourself is the hard part. Learning to live with the only person you'll ever be."

"That almost sounds morbid."

Jeremy finished his drink and on an impulse called the waiter and asked for the check. When it came, there was a two dollar and fifty cents cover charge per

person. "Ouch!" Jeremy said, showing it to Phyllis.

"I could have told you. All of the places along here are clip joints. They always are, in a boom town like this. I can pay the bill if you want."

"Don't be silly," Jeremy said. "I've enough money."

He paid the bill and they went outside. It was a hot still night and the sky was full of stars.

"Just think," Phyllis said, "one of these days soon you might be up there."

"Me? Not after I took off."

"Well, you never know. Maybe it's part of the testing they give you. Maybe a normal guy would up and take off like that."

"Sure," Jeremy said sarcastically. And what if he got the same itch—while he was up there?"

"Well, that's different," Phyllis said stubbornly. "Besides, if that's the way you feel, why'd you come down off the Mountain?"

Jeremy didn't answer right away. They walked to the end of the street and turned left. They walked another block, and suddenly the town wasn't there. Satellite Station had not been built this far from the Mountain. Without talking, they began to walk out across the desert. Far off, a coyote howled mournfully.

"Well," Phyllis persisted, "you haven't answered my question?"

"Because I can't answer it. If I could, I guess I wouldn't be down here now."

"But try. Isn't it important that you try?"

"Maybe I don't know if I ought to try. I don't mean answering the question. I mean going up there and being, well—"

"More lonely than a man has ever been before in history, is that what you mean?"

"Maybe. I hope you don't think this is egotistical. But sometimes I don't know if the world's worth it."

"It isn't egotistical. You don't think so much of the world, maybe. But you already said you don't think so much of yourself, either."

"Heck, who am I to complain about things? Who am I to try and criticize our way of life? The Reds can have theirs: it's stifling, it shackles men when men should be free. But . . ."

"But our way isn't any bed of roses either, is that what you're trying to say?"

"I guess so. Like that bar in there. Five bucks cover, just because we stopped for one drink. That's what they do, exploit each other."

"Don't take it so to heart. And there's nothing wrong with that kind of exploitation, is there, if you're free to say no. In our way of life, you can always say no."

"I'm not comparing our way of life with the Red's. There isn't any question about theirs, I already said that. It's the old story about men being born free but living in chains. It's the Russian version of the story. Their way

of life, because it puts men in chains, is evil."

"Then you've answered your own question. If you're selected to—to go up—you've got to say yes. Maybe that will be one small event in a chain which finally will make their system crumble into ruin."

"Could be. But why me? I'll stand down here and cheer—along with everyone else—for whoever goes up. I'll cheer and charge my five buck cover charge to all the suckers."

"Jeremy! Don't make it sound so important." She stood and faced him in the dim starlight, her hands on her hips, her face tilted up because he was a head taller.

He bent abruptly and kissed her. She responded gently, briefly, and then pushed away from him.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I don't know what made me do that. You looked so pretty standing there?"

"See? You exploited me," Phyllis said, smiling. "You won my confidence and kissed me in a weak moment."

Jeremy didn't smile. "You could have said no."

"Stop taking yourself so seriously! I was fooling."

Jeremy walked back toward town. In a few steps she caught up with him. "Hey, stop walking so fast."

He slowed down and held out his hand. She took it, and squeezed.

They walked along that way,

not talking, until they saw the fire.

"Jeremy," Phyllis said. "Jeremy, look over there." She wasn't excited or alarmed yet, but just pointing something out to him.

On the edge of town, but a quarter of a mile south of them, something was glowing. Before Jeremy could answer, they heard a siren's loud undulating wail.

"Fire!" Phyllis cried. And she started running.

She wasn't the only one. Jeremy ran with her, easily, effortlessly, and became aware of other figures in the night, seeming to spring up from nowhere but in reality coming from all the identical pre-fab houses on the edge of Satellite City.

"We don't have a paid fire department," Phyllis explained as they ran. "We have volunteers though."

For some reason Jeremy did not understand immediately, there was pride in her voice. She could run like the wind, too.

When they were still some distance away from the burning building they heard the ominous billowing sound of the hungry flames. Despite the late hour, half a dozen cars sped past—but in the opposite direction.

"Volunteer firemen," Phyllis explained. "Fire station's down that way. They're going for equipment. They'll be back."

They were back—or others were. And in a hurry. Because, before Jeremy and Phyllis had covered the quarter of a mile, a

gleaming new fire engine sped past them. The men on the running board and clinging to the ladders, Jeremy saw, were in civilian clothing.

Then, just a few hundred yards ahead of them, the fire engine screeched to a stop. The pre-fab house was really burning now, and a glance told Jeremy that the neighboring buildings were also in danger. Flames licked hungrily, a wind blew off the desert, and the fire-fighters were still uncoiling their hoses. By the time Jeremy and Phyllis ran up, a large crowd had gathered. The size of the crowd, despite the hour, astonished Jeremy. Fully half the adults in Satellite City, if he were any judge of their numbers, were milling in the streets.

"Keep back!" someone shouted.

"Out of the way!"

"Give us room!"

A huddle of people stood apart from the crowd about twenty yards from the fire engine and forty or fifty yards from the blazing building. Jeremy and Phyllis weren't a dozen feet from them and could see three men forcibly restraining another man. The latter, struggling to get free, was wearing pajamas.

"You don't understand," he said, pleading. "I've got to go in there. My boy. My boy's still in there. On the second floor. In back. You don't understand. Please. Oh, God, please. I've got to go in there before it's too late."

"Easy, Matt," one of the other men said.

"Easy? I'm trying to tell you. It's Tom. Tom's still in there."

A woman sitting on the curb nearby held her face in her hands and sobbed. Even in the darkness, Jeremy could see the convulsive movements of her shoulders. She was wearing a nightgown and a robe.

"You can't, Matt," one of the men said. "Liable to collapse any second. It'd be suicide. And the flames . . ."

The man called Matt suddenly broke away. He took two staggering steps toward the burning building, silhouetted momentarily against the flames. Then one of the other men brought him down with a flying tackle and they rolled over and over on the sidewalk, struggling. At last the man called Matt was subdued. He sat, crying unashamedly, as the woman was crying.

Meanwhile, a powerful jet of water from the first hose to be put into play was hissing into the flames.

"My boy!" the man pleaded. "Tom . . ."

Phyllis was squeezing Jeremy's hand, a look of concern and sympathy on her face. Without warning, without saying a word, Jeremy broke away from her.

She didn't even have time to ask him what he was doing. She watched, horror and fascination in her eyes, as Jeremy ran toward the blazing building. He



went straight into the stream of jetting water, intentionally. It bowled him over and a volunteer fireman shouted for him to keep clear. When he got up he was soaking wet. He had wanted that. He would have to be wet to have any chance at all in that blazing inferno.

Then, dripping water, he plunged through the burned out front door of the building.

"Jeremy!" Phyllis called, clutching at her throat.

"Time," Dr. Maddon said, trying to mask the despair in his voice. "All we need is a little time."

The Senator frowned and spread his hands. "That's what you brought us here for today," he reminded Maddon. "Today you were going to make the decision. Today you were going to announce who the man would be. We're waiting. Aren't we, General?"

All the laconic general did was nod.

"Of course he's unpredictable," Dr. Maddon tried to explain. "The tests told us that. He's no conformist, gentlemen. He wouldn't do the expected."

"Then I say you can't depend on him. How can you depend on a man like that—up there?"

"What do you want," Maddon asked passionately, "a machine? Because machines we have plenty of. Computers, rocket engines, super-powerful radios. So do the Russians. We don't want a machine of a man. We want

... oh, what's the use. You're not listening, are you?"

The Senator gave him a sympathetic look. "Now that Budd's gone AWOL, anything you say is purely rhetorical. You can understand that, can't you? You can't consider him now."

"The only thing I can understand is that we've got to put the right man up there—or else. Jeremy Budd's the right man. I know he is. Everyone who's been part of the elaborate screening and testing knows he is. Just give me a little time."

"How much time?" the general asked practically. "Because the moon's ready to go, Doctor. Would you keep it back—for a deserter?"

"He's no deserter. He's free to come and go. Free to do anything he wants."

"Come now," the Senator said. "You didn't expect him to leave the Mountain."

Maddon shook his head slowly. "No, frankly, I didn't. But that's just it. Budd wouldn't do what you expect. He's impulsive. He has strong random drives. He . . ."

". . . Has disappeared," the general reminded Maddon.

"This country," Maddon said slowly, "has been without a frontier, gentlemen, for too long. We just haven't had the need for a—well, for a frontier type individual for a long time. But we need one now. Whether we rise to greater heights or fail utterly will depend on if we get one or not. Here on the Mountain, we

believe we've found one. He's Jeremy Budd.

"Can you expect a man unconsciously ready for the next—and greatest—frontier to be like everyone else?"

"From what I've seen of his record," the Senator said, "he didn't strike me like any Lone Ranger type."

"That's not what I mean. You're twisting my words. Each frontier needs a different type of frontier individual. What we need now is a man who, in the face of the security and mutual dependence of a successful democracy, the most successful democracy in the world, is still able to act like a free individual with values, even if you sometimes find them capricious, more important to him than the security he's trying to preserve for us."

"Scientific double-talk," scoffed the Senator.

"All right. You asked me how much time. Give us till dawn, gentlemen. That isn't asking for too much, is it? If Jeremy Budd doesn't return of his own free will by dawn, we'll make some other decision."

"That sounds fair enough," admitted the general.

"Till dawn," said the Senator.

At first Jeremy thought his clothing was smoking, and that frightened him. Then he realized that what he saw was steam rising from his garments, steam from the soaking he had taken. He felt hot but strangely clammy. He tried to breathe, but it

resulted in a fit of coughing. He could barely see—except, of course, for the blinding orange glow of the flames ahead of him, and the bright, licking tongues of fire licking at the walls to left and right.

He knew he only had seconds, but time seemed to expand for him, to encompass far more than the isolated instant in the burning building, to stop, to wait, to hang — hovering — all around him. He had only been inside for a matter of seconds now, barely enough to reach the staircase on the far wall. He stumbled and thought he shouted with pain, for whatever he touched to right himself was hot. But he heard nothing except the billowing roar of the flames.

He went upstairs, wondering if the staircase would collapse before he could get down again—with or without the boy.

And still, the strange feeling of temporal suspension persisted. Previously, in the weeks of boredom on the Mountain, time had seemed to speed by with paradoxical speed. He had never seemed to have enough time to sit down and think things out. He had not been able to marshal his thoughts.

Do I want to go up there? he thought now as he climbed the stairs in the burning building.

He didn't mean up the stairs, in search of the boy who he had never seen before and who would surely burn to death if he wasn't reached, and soon.

He meant up—from the

Mountain—in the first manned space vehicle.

Now, as at the proverbial instant of death, his thoughts were crystalline in their clarity. A line from a novel he had read during his three months in solitude on the Mountain came back to him—here, of all places, when his thoughts should have been of fear, of fire, of death. The line was from *War and Peace*. The character—Jeremy did not even remember his name—was dying. His final words to his loved ones had been: "It's all simple. It's all so simple."

He had meant the mystery of life and death. And he had died with the knowledge of that mystery, and perhaps its solution, if there was a solution, in his mind.

Yes, Jeremy thought. Yes, it was all so simple. He had come down from the Mountain doubting, somehow hoping to be vouchsafed a vision of his own future by spending a few hours in the city at the foot of the Mountain.

And, incredibly, it had happened. Phyllis was part of it, for it was nice to know there were girls like Phyllis. But Phyllis hardly mattered now. And the people of the city, the volunteer firemen who had rushed to the burning building in the middle of the night, possibly at the risk of their lives, they were part of it too. They were part of mankind. For Jeremy, in his foreshortened perspective, while time

and the world seemed to hang waiting, they stood for man holding out a helping hand to his fellows. Stood for the brotherhood of mankind.

They had done everything they could possibly do—except one thing. Jeremy could not blame them for not doing that final thing, not making that final gesture.

But none of them had gone into the flaming building after the trapped boy.

Jeremy Budd had gone in.

Why? He didn't know why. He had never thought of himself as a hero. Not only had he led a rather ordinary life, but he had actually considered himself—all the more startling that he had been selected for the tests on the Mountain, he thought—as something of a failure.

Yet here he was, where no one else had dared to go.

Why? The same nagging question. He couldn't answer it, and quite possibly he would never be able to answer it. Impulse, he thought. But impulse alone couldn't explain it. He was here, and it was enough. And he knew, with sudden tremendous insight, that, if he got out of the building, he would be selected to man the rocket, to go up.

The others had volunteered of their time, their effort, their sweat—collectively to share the danger and keep the community functioning.

But he had gone in alone. It didn't matter why. He had gone in. He was Jeremy Budd.

Pioneer in space . . . .

There was a loud noise.

Something crashed below the stairs as part of a wall gave way, engulfed hungrily by the flames. Whatever it was, it seemed to put Jeremy's time sense back into kilter. He had never stopped moving, but he still wasn't at the top of the stairs.

He seemed to reach them very quickly after that. He ran down a hall thick with smoke. Curling, speculative flames were licking at the landing behind him. He tried a door. It was jammed. He threw his weight against it, stumbling into a room as it gave way suddenly.

It was a bedroom. Empty.

He tried another door. Another room. Empty.

He heard a thin wail, and ran on down the hall.

It was the nursery, and a three-year-old choking on smoke stood cowering near the small bed as he opened the door. He looked up at Jeremy. He was crying, but rubbed his eyes with sooty hands, trying to be brave.

"Did Daddy send you to get me?" he wanted to know.

Jeremy nodded, and took off his jacket, which was still damp. He wrapped it quickly about the boy, scooped him up, and ran.

The bottom stairs gave way under his weight. He fell, righted himself, never let go of the boy, who cuddled against his chest confidently, not making a sound. He stumbled outside, and a great shout went up. Vaguely, he was aware of the whole

façade of the building crumbling. Then his senses faded . . .

He awoke in bed.

The room was dim, but he could see Phyllis sitting at his bedside, watching him. He smiled up at her. He didn't feel too bad, considering. Just weak.

"How long—" he began.

"Don't talk. You're in a hospital, Jeremy. You were suffering from smoke poisoning. Mr. and Mrs. Chambers are outside, waiting to thank you."

He looked around the room. A dim night light burned, and the window was still dark. "What time is it?" he asked. "How long have I been unconscious?"

"A couple of hours before dawn, I guess. They say you'll need two or three days of rest. Want to hear what it sounds like to be a hero? It's on the radio and everything."

"In the middle of the night?"

"We have night workers in Satellite City, like any place else. More so, because they have to keep the Mountain functioning. They insist on twenty-four hour news coverage," Phyllis said proudly. "They like to know what's going on in the world."

The Jeremy Budd of a few hours ago would have taken offense, would have said, "Meaning, I don't?" But the new Jeremy Budd, who suddenly understood so much, was proud of these people too and would make sacrifices for them—any sacrifice necessary—despite their limitations. Or did their limitations

make a Jeremy Budd both necessary and possible? . . . Yes, that might be the answer.

Phyllis turned on the radio.

" . . . risk of his own life, carrying little Tommy Chambers from the fire seconds before the entire building collapsed. He has been identified as Jeremy Budd, a resident of the Mountain. His injuries were diagnosed as not serious by Dr. Lemuel . . . here is a bulletin just handed to me. An urgent appeal has just reached us from the Mountain. It is an appeal directed at . . ." the announcer's voice sounded suddenly startled . . . "Jeremy Budd! He has until dawn to report back to Dr. Maddon of the Testing Program. We don't know what this means, ladies and gentlemen, but Dr. Maddon says the selection will have to be made without Jeremy Budd unless he can return to the Mountain by dawn. Since activities on the Mountain are shrouded in secrecy, no speculation is possible, but we hope that Jeremy Budd is listening . . ."

Jeremy threw the covers to one side and got up. A wave of dizziness swept over him as he went to the closet for his clothing.

"They want you to—go?" Phyllis asked.

He nodded.

"And you want to—now?"

He nodded again. "I'll never make it on foot," he said. "There's no time—"

Phyllis ran from the room. Jeremy dressed swiftly, even

though he knew he would be too late.

Just as he finished putting his clothes on, the door opened. Phyllis and Mr. Chambers rushed into the room. "I'll take you," Chambers said. "In my car. Come on. The young lady explained. I—I won't even try to thank you, young fellow. Words would kind of ruin how we all feel, I guess. Well, let's get going."

As Jeremy left the hospital with Phyllis and Mr. Chambers, a great cheer went up from the crowd waiting outside.

Then, moments later, with a lurch and a roar, Chambers' car started up the steep Mountain trail. Other vehicles followed, a great many of them, as if, somehow, it was very important to the townies that Jeremy reached the top of the Mountain in time.

He looked at the sky. The first dim white of false dawn was already brightening the horizon.

"Admit it, Doctor," the Senator said, "he'll never show up. He only has minutes now."

With the general, they were waiting at the only gate leading into the government reservation atop the Mountain. They had been waiting, in the pre-dawn chill, for almost two hours.

The whole program, Dr. Maddon thought, the whole program might fail if they didn't have Jeremy. It had been built around the need for a man like Jeremy Budd. And now . . .

Now there was a cloud of dust,

dimly seen in the pre-dawn light, far below on the trail leading up the Mountain.

"Admit it," the Senator said. "We've given you every break we could. Even including an urgent radio appeal . . . Say, what's that down there?"

The cloud of dust became a long file of vehicles on the narrow road.

They drew closer, the sound of their engines a roaring.

The first car came to a stop, the others piling up behind it.

The sun, bloated and orange at the dawn of a new day, began to come up.

Jeremy Budd stepped out of the first car.

What happened next always amazed Dr. Maddon afterwards. Other people leaped from the other cars and surrounded Jeremy. In a moment, he was borne up on their shoulders and led triumphantly toward the gate amidst much shouting. He lean-

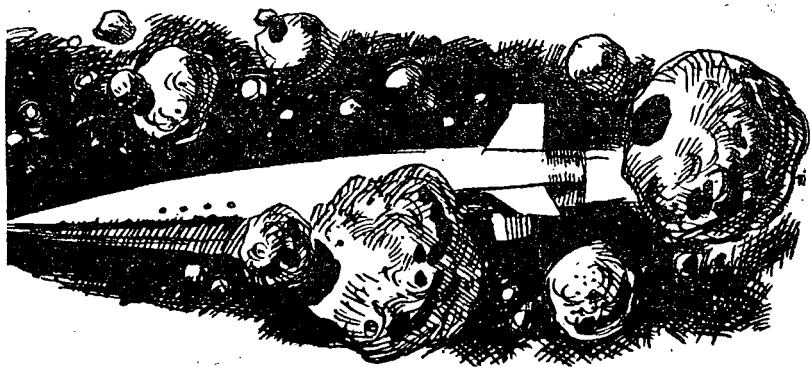
ed down and said something to a girl running alongside. Dr. Maddon didn't hear his words, but he heard the girl's voice faintly over the noise of the crowd because she was very close.

" . . . I'll be waiting, Jeremy . . . "

Later, the Senator and the general never protested the decision to send Jeremy Budd up in the first manned space vehicle. They didn't know how he had done it, but obviously he had managed, in a few short hours, to capture the imagination and enthusiasm of the townies down below . . .

What the Senator and the general never learned, and what Dr. Maddon did not even suspect, was that the townies had captured Jeremy Budd's imagination too, and his affection; and, in their brotherhood, had made his special achievement possible.

**THE END**





Fill in and mail the coupon below . . .

# You'll get 2 issues of Amazing Stories FREE!

Here's how . . .

ONE YEAR (12 issues) of AMAZING STORIES would cost you \$4.20 if bought individually. But if you fill in the order form below, you can have a full year of AMAZING delivered right to your home for only \$3.50! This low subscription rate brings you the equivalent of  
*2 issues free!*

And during the next twelve months, you'll read the best science-fiction being written or published anywhere—twelve complete novels (one in each issue) written by such masters as E. E. Smith, Charles Eric Maine, Robert Bloch, Poul Anderson and Fritz Leiber. You'll also read the finest short works in the field, written by outstanding s-f writers of today, as well as an occasional vintage masterpiece by one of science-fiction's immortals.

*Fill in and mail coupon today!*

**AMAZING STORIES • 434 South Wabash Avenue • Chicago 5, Illinois**

- ☐ Please enter my subscription to AMAZING for one year for only \$3.50.  
☐ Sign me up for the special 2-year rate of only \$6.50. (This brings me the equivalent of *more than five issues free!*)  
☐ Payment enclosed. ☐ Please bill me.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ ZONE \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

AM 10-9

# UNAUTHORIZED

By HAROLD CALIN



**First it was the moon shot, then the space platform, then the moon itself. But the solar system wasn't big enough for what Peter Henderson was carrying around in his soul.**

*Alpha Centauri, a star visible from Earth's southern heavens, lies at a distance of four and one-third light years, or twenty-five trillion miles from this solar system. It is the closest star to the system. It is now known that Alpha Centauri supports its own solar system of seventeen planets, the ninth of which, Alpha Centauri IX, is believed to be habitable by terrestrial life. This latter theory was reached in conjunction with the determined outcome of the famous Henderson-Davis*

*expedition. (See Henderson-Davis, in Catalogue 6, Unauthorized Expeditions.) Journal of Extra-terrestrial Commentaries, Catalogue I, The Stars of Galaxy I.*

**I**T IS much better now, he thought. The pain is going away and only this light feeling coming on.

They will have seen the landing. Landing, that's a laugh. How am I still alive? That's a good question. Think about it for a while. Philip is dead, and

you're pretty damn close to it yourself. No, I'm not. Okay, let's kid about it. Alpha Centauri IX, Peter Henderson, R.I.P. That's okay with me. But they saw the landing. And now they have the papers, the plans, the drive works. The landing will prove it. They were watching. They had to be.

He laughed aloud, but stopped, suddenly, frightened by the sound of the laughter, and the pain in his chest. They were watching. Sure, but they won't see it for four years and four months. This realization entered Peter Henderson slowly, and for a long while he thought no thoughts, his eyes fixed on the crushed body of Philip Davis six feet away across the cabin of the first star ship built by man.

If I can hold out for . . . how long? Four years and a third, say another four years, then four years and a third more . . . if the instruments were right . . . if. That's only twelve years and a half, or so. That will make me fifty-three years old. Okay, I'll wait, he thought, then laughed aloud again. This time only the pain stopped him.

How long had he lain with the pain that made it impossible to even think? Perhaps several minutes, perhaps several days, a week, longer. No, he wasn't hungry. It couldn't be that long. He'd be dead from hunger by now, if nothing more. And there's plenty more, he thought.

There's hell's own amount more.

Now he was able to move. The paralysis must have been initial shock, he thought. There's something broken in my chest and I can't straighten up all the way. But I feel my legs and feet now, and my hands, and I can see and hear. Hear? What's there to hear? Myself laughing, that's what's to hear.

We were in too much of a hurry with this, he thought. I was thirty-seven years old when this trip started. There are supplies enough for another twenty years, even if I don't leave the ship. Pills carry easily. Okay, I'll wait. But I'll have to let them know. I'll get out of the ship and activate the drive and let her blow herself to hell and gone. They'll see that, all right. If they saw the landing, they'll see that. And they saw the landing. They were expecting it. I mean, they will be. The papers told them everything, and they'll be waiting. At Jodrell Bank, they'll be waiting. It's only been about a few hours or so. I'll get out. I've got to. But the weight, and I'm tired. I'm really tired. I'll rest first, then I'll see about getting out. He lay back.

*Then he was in Monte Carlo, up the mountain in the empty villa with the garden, and looking down, he could see the city spread out like diamonds in a necklace and the harbor with the long breakwater, and the Russian girl asked him about the moon.*

*Oh, we've only been there, he*

*had said, we haven't even begun to see what there is there. The other side? It's just like the side we see. No mysterious little men, no hidden juggernauts from Mars, secretly preparing to invade the Earth. Nothing but desert and craters, like the southern Sahara. You've seen the southern Sahara? She had seen the southern Sahara. It's just like that, only you wear big suits with bubbles over your face, and the suits are hot and you can't scratch your face if it itches. You can go crazy trying to scratch your face. But we've only just been there. We really haven't seen anything yet.*

*That was after the first moon shot. It had started with going out beyond the satellites and taking a look. A rocket plane the first time. He had gone far out, then bounced down off the atmosphere and glided around the earth nine times, bouncing like that, until he came back down, landing in Australia that first time.*

*And the world had met Peter Henderson very fast. He was famous. He had been around the world nine times and then some in four days without ever coming down. But there was too much rush for that to last long. He had done it six times more, lengthening his stay aloft each time, but it was almost back-page stuff by the last trip. Because it was proven that man could live in space in free-fall, and as far as the world was concerned, that was that. It wasn't*

*politics anymore. There was no edge in space, and the psychological advantage of America being first was old hat.*

*So they built the space platform.*

I can lay here till I rot, he thought, back on Alpha Centauri IX now, the pain lessening still more, and very much aware of his situation again. I've got to get out of this coffin, and let it become my messenger back home. He struggled to his feet for the first time, feeling that he would buckle and go all the way. But he caught himself and then, standing and getting used to it, he felt better. It was a start.

First he made his way to the instruments. They were all working. All that he could see, anyway. It was built well, he thought. But they were in too much of a hurry. He tested the generators, activated them, and turned the scanner. On the screen, the landscape of Alpha Centauri IX came into view. It was not unlike someplace he had once seen. Tropical, overgrown with very Earth-like trees and grasses. We thought we were very big, he thought. No place like Earth in all Kingdom Come. This looks like the Everglades to me. Only an hour from Miami in a car. Come back, Pete.

He turned the scanner beam a full 360 degrees, and saw only more of this vegetation and a brilliant bluish white sunlight. He checked the outside indicators. Temperature was hot, 115

degrees, but that could be the still-cooling metal of the ship's skin. God knew it was like an oven inside. He opened the intake of the analyzer, allowing a sample of the atmosphere, if there was one, to enter. There must be, he corrected himself. The sunlight. The analyzer mechanism punched a card and dropped it through the decoding section. Nitrogen and Oxygen mainly, Oxygen almost four and a half to one Nitrogen. Like Earth. It also contained in varying but small percentages every element in Earth's air—argon, carbon dioxide, helium, krypton, neon, and xenon. There was a degree of liquid vapor, the liquid, water.

He turned off the analyzer and grew quiet for a long time. It's all the same, he thought. It must

He placed his finger on the switch of the outer airlock and turned. The green light showed that the moving systems, in that part of the ship, still worked. Then his finger moved to the inner lock switch. *For a fleeting instant he saw New York—not the Empire State Building or the museums or Rockefeller Center, but a small brownstone building on West 10th Street off Fifth Avenue, and a pretty dark girl smiling and calling his name Peter and himself, turning, and his pocket catching on the end of a brass banister and tearing. And the girl suddenly laughing.* He pressed the button of the outer lock, prepared to reverse

the motion of the door facing him now in an instant.

The door slid open slowly and the blue white light filtered into the crushed cabin, striking across the unmoving body of Philip Davis, and Peter panicked and reversed the switch. The door quickly slid shut, humming softly. After a moment, he switched the door open again, letting it come all the way this time, and a draft of cool air came to him from the outside. It was the ship cooling, he thought. It's cool and bright, in spite of the vegetation and jungle. He took his finger from the switch and made his way across the cabin to the door.

The ship lay on its side, so the door had opened upward. Standing by the door he could see out past the outer lock the soft green land, and breathe the air. The air was cool, and somehow sweeter than that of Earth. Seeing all the greenery and expecting damp, he thought it would smell bad, as air in Earth jungles always smells bad from the rot that is drowned in new growth. He went past the inner lock to the outer door, and looked down. The ground was not far below the door and green and firm. His weight felt about right. Suddenly he felt a great nausea. It's the pain in my chest. He held his breath, then spat out the doorway. The spittle was clotted with blood and became lost in the grass when it hit the ground.

Man's first act on another living world, he thought, and smil-

ed, but the nausea welled up and he swallowed hard again. Then it began to get to him. The realization of the landing came upon him. They won't see the landing. We made it good, a bit off kilter, enough to ruin the ship, but the explosion must have all been in my head. I've got to get off two signals, he thought. One for the landing, and one to show that something happened afterward.

Something happened afterward, all right, he thought. First Philip Davis was killed in the landing, then Peter Henderson died of old age waiting. Waiting for what? I have to rest. He sat down in the companionway leaning against the open outer lock and looked out on the new world. Man's newest conquest, and me the conquerer. Peter Henderson, Conquistadore.

*So they built a space platform.*

*The big wheel. It made big headlines. But it took three years to complete, and by then its usefulness was gone. No more headlines after three years. The eruption of the moon itself would be a headline only once. We learned, he thought. At first, all you could see was a big blue ball. But infra-red scanners made it look like the globe back in the living room, with the Great Lakes standing out blue against the tan and gold land, and the blue—almost black Pacific, and for a while that was big stuff.*

*He remembered a time in that first year on the "wheel" when all they did was play cards. First*

*he lost his pay for a month in advance. Then, going in deeper, he lost more and more in advance so that all he would be able to do for three years would be draw basic rations and, every-time he dropped to earth, pay his salary out to Philip Davis.*

*But after the year was up, Davis wouldn't hold him to it, and they went to Venice that first leave together. The smell of the canals was the only disappointment, but not the rest of the city. Oh, he had seen the world, all right. That was the good part of being Peter Henderson. More money than he would ever be able to use, and plenty of leave time. They had seen Venice, then the whole Venetian plain, and the Dolomites, and Lago Maggiore and Stresa. Then down to Milan, and back up to Cortina. It had been a very great holiday, and, near the end, Philip had told him of the Moon shot.*

*After that, he realized how little he had seen. It had been more looking at, than seeing. And he was sorry. He didn't get back to Italy again.*

*And the time on the platform with Jackson going out in the space suit and refusing to come back. He had walked around the outer shell of the "wheel" for hours, talking about seeing the world for the first time without rose-colored infra-red magnifiers. Peter remembered all of them inside listening on the intercom as he talked, and not understanding what he said. Jackson was*



*the only one of the original crew to crack, and after a time, after they had gone out to get him and he let go his tie-line and used his remaining oxygen to blast away from the "wheel" and they, never seeing him again, but hearing a final scream—how, after that, when all they did was gamble and how someone had said maybe Jackson was the only one who hadn't cracked, they had all laughed, enough time had passed by then, but the laughter rang hollow, and Peter had promised himself to have the best holiday ever, after that. The next holiday had been the Venice trip with Philip. You never learn. But had he, Peter, learned? He had learned. Wasn't he the first man to set foot on the Moon? Yes, and the best part of that was going back to Earth.*

Peter Henderson was now struggling to his feet again. He returned to the ship's cabin, looked down at the body of Philip Davis, the inventor of the star drive. So simple, really. H. G. Wells had struck on it without realizing it. That story about the first men to the Moon. A globe with antimagnetic mirrors, and the men inside. Opening and closing shutters over the mirrors. It wasn't that simple, of course. But antimagnetism, the attraction of light to light, and against light . . . Peter felt the tiredness again. He sat down carefully in his cockpit and leaned his head against its side.

Got to bury Philip. A fitting

grave. Call the Planet Davis, after Philip. Who ever heard of a planet called Davis? Stupid. Get out, Peter, he thought. Bury Philip in his star drive. You couldn't get him out from under the instrument panel, anyway. The air is cool. Must get telescoping ladder to outer port. Two signals . . . one for when we got here, the other for afterward, so they'll come.

Then he slept.

He woke in darkness, but a darkness bathed in soft light coming through the open lock and casting three individual shadows of everything. He had to spit again before he could breathe easily. Then it was better. It was warm now. Warmer than in the light. But a clear dry warm. He stood up. He did not know that the action of standing up took him almost fifteen minutes.

The telescoping ladder was stowed with the pressure equipment, and that would mean climbing down to it. No, the ship was on its side, so he could walk. He walked to the hatch that led "down" to the pressure gear locker, noticing now that he felt heavier. The ladder was easily managed in one hand, being telescoped and of the lightest dural. He carried it to the open outer lock, and looked out, seeing the land, now bathed in the cool light of three pale yellow moons, warm and soft, and yes, how tired he was. He made the double catches fast to the edge of the lock, and disengaged the

clasp of the ladder. The ladder dropped, its rungs standing horizontal in the wake of the untelescoping verticals, swiftly reaching the ground, and landing with a gentle push as it bedded itself firmly in the green ground.

Food, Peter thought. Capsules, yes, but they are all the food we need. We? I, that's what I mean. Philip doesn't need food any more. Neither do you, something somewhere said to him. I know, he said. But I must save the food capsules.

He returned to the pressure gear locker, got the remaining pans of capsules, went back to the lock and dropped them out. They fell right alongside the ladder base. Then he returned to the cabin for the last time.

He had to sit again. I wonder what they'll call this trip, he thought. The Davis-Henderson expedition, or the Henderson-Davis expedition? That's something to think about now, isn't it? Why not wonder about what kind of medals they'll give you? Posthumously, of course. What do you mean, posthumously? Then, suddenly, Peter Henderson began to laugh again. It raised the nausea again, and he spat. It only hurts when I laugh, he thought, and laughed again. Your thoughts are nuts, he said to himself.

"Well, shouldn't they be?" he asked aloud.

No, he thought soberly. Get the drive activated on delay action, and get the hell out of here.

Is that all? No parting words? No souvenirs? Weapons. A man needs weapons. If there's life out there, there may be moving life. And if there's moving life, a man needs weapons.

But the only weapon in the ship was a simple gas pistol, used for flares on the Moon, and that was also in the pressure gear locker. Get it on the way out, he instructed himself. It's pretty deadly at close or point-blank range, if you point the flare pellets at something. At what?

*Then he remembered the Moon and the first landing, sitting down slowly on a seemingly solid jet of white hot flame, the tripod sliding out and clicking into place. And then the long legs adjusting for perfect vertical rest position as the Moon ship had come down.*

*They'd been to the Moon, but they'd only looked about, not really done any seeing yet. Why was knowing what was on the other side the most important thing? All the time they knew that the other side was no more than a dead copy of the side we knew. First radio contact had been like a theater opening. They'd prepared his first message, so that man could have an anthem-like first statement for history. The old ones, it seemed, didn't have authentic enough rings about them, even though they were real. The old ones like "What Hath God Wrought," or "Mr. Watson, come here a min-*

ute," or "Mary had a little lamb."

They had prepared the first Moon to Earth direct radio message, and he, Peter Henderson, had spoken it to the world—"We have landed. The stone has been pried loose, and man is no longer bound. Now it shall roll on through the galaxies, ever growing, ever increasing the knowledge and power of human mankind. I greet you from the Moon."

Then, two years later, when the first permanent colony was established, they had not wondered too much about Philip Davis' "explorations" in the crater Archimedes. He had blasted a cave the size of Grand Central Station beneath the surface, and there had built the first star drive. It was so simple in essence that he had done most of the work alone, and then he, Peter Henderson, had secretly joined the staff that now became two, and finished the drive unit. The ship itself was the original Moon ship cabin, commandeered in parts to the cave, and enveloped in the sleeve of Philip's mirror system. Seven years in all, they had worked, with as many month long holidays on Earth. Then, leaving papers with the results of their labors and plans, they had gone out on another "exploration" trip, and not returned.

He thought of the first Moon landing again, and after the preliminary exploration was over, and they were preparing to lift off, Peter had pulled his pièce de

resistance, thrown an empty beer can out before they closed the outside hatch. He'd brought the empty can with him expressly for the purpose. Man had to leave his mark on the Moon, and Peter had done it. Perhaps, he thought now, the saddest part of it was that he had brought the beer can empty all the way. Manufactured a poor joke. Not even a sudden thoughtless improvisation, but a planned one. A sort of dirty joke on the Moon, and he had never told anyone about it afterward.

He rose from the cockpit for the last time, set the controls and firing mechanisms for full power, and set the delay automatic priming gear for two hours hence. Then he looked at the body of Philip Davis quietly for a short time, and made his way out, going by way of the pressure gear locker for the flare pistol. He took an extra magazine of flare pellets and the pistol, already loaded, and went to the outer lock.

How long he had been at everything did not strike him until he looked out the lock. The positions of the three moons had altered very noticeably, and one was on the horizon. The other two were close behind. Of course, he thought, this can be a very rapidly cycled planet. Of course, it must be. Half the night seemed to have passed in just the past few minutes.

Peter Henderson's whole feeling seemed to rebel against leaving the ship, his one last tie to

the world and life of men. There was another man aboard. Dead, yes, but his great friend. He turned toward the cabin, saw his triple shadow overlaying the cabin floor and bent up against Philip's broken cockpit seat, and he could see Philip's shoulder in the light from behind him. Then he looked away.

He stuck the pistol into his belt and lowered himself to his hands and knees. Edging toward the ladder, the nausea hit him again and he had to stop and rest. How long was it now, since he had set the controls? Several minutes, no more. He labored over the edge of the lock and set his right foot on the first rung below him, then his left on the one below that. Then, slowly, carefully, he lowered himself to the ground.

He felt no emotion upon touching the land of Alpha Centauri IX, the first human to do so. Perhaps Peter was overcome by the thought of Philip; or the series of "firsts" which he had experienced had hardened him to even the first thrill of the landing. Or perhaps it was the nausea and the pain in his chest which was growing worse, and not lessening, since he woke from the sleep in the cabin. He wished he could forget the pain.

The climb down the ladder had weakened him so, that he collapsed to the ground and lay there, not finding comfort in it. The pans of capsules lay under him, pressing against where his chest was broken.

*Now he saw the dark girl again, on the steps of the brown-stone in lower New York. She was smiling still at his torn pocket and he looked down and saw the pocket torn and all his peanuts on the steps. I don't see what's so funny, he said. And Emmy looked at him, her large brown eyes alive with laughter, and said: I didn't mean it to laugh about the jacket. It was just you standing there with the peanuts falling all over the place that seemed so funny. I'll apologize if it will make you feel better.*

*He smiled then, and they talked, and walked downtown together and ended up at a restaurant on Charles Street that had bullfight posters on the walls. They had eaten Paella a la Valenciana, and Nardilla for dessert. A creamy tan stuff with cinnamon sprinkled on top. He had not tried to be flippant with her about the Moon. She asked him how it felt, knowing you were there, and he could only say it felt strange. Nothing more. Two hundred forty thousand miles and years and millions to feel strange.*

*Then he remembered the girl, who was his wife now, in the flat-bottomed boat, trying to land a bonefish on light tackle in the flats off Key West, and the fish fighting head down, all silvery like a bullet and taking out more and more line, and Emmy's rod bent almost double, and then there was no more line and the sharp crack as the line went and*

*the bonefish with it. And how they had laughed. Then the plane to Havana with the woman who cried the whole way about how her baby's eardrums would be pierced by the height and the sound of the jets. And the music in the bar there. The one melody he could never remember, but would never forget.*

*Then the stupid accident, she lying under the car on Fifth Avenue, her chest crushed, not letting him touch her and crying until she cried her eyes closed and died.*

And the memory brought back the pain in his chest and he was back now, rising painfully to his knees, aware that he was weaker still than he had been, and taking the pans of capsules, crawling away toward a piece of high green ground. He knew it was not far enough, but it would be an objective for the present. If he could make the high ground, he would make himself get farther, if only to the other side of it.

He reached the high ground, by that time having risen to his feet, running in spurts and falling, resting, rising and running again. Once there, he rolled over on his back and rested.

Then he remembered the two signals. One for when we land, the other to show we're still alive. There can't be two signals now, he thought. It's all right. Once they get the second signal, they'll know we got down all right. No, that's not right. They

won't know the signal was meant to be a second one. There will only be one signal.

He knew he had rested long enough and that this high ground was not far enough away, once the reactor would be set off. How much time was there? Not much, he knew. Then he heard the whine of the starter batteries, and he knew the time was now. And he wondered why he had ever let Philip Davis talk him into this, all the time remembering that he had pleaded for the chance since Emmy was gone and now there was nothing. Really nothing. Then he looked back toward the ship, surprised by how far he had come, and suddenly the ship began to rise.

It rose slowly and gracefully until the nose was pointed straight up and the tail was resting perfectly balanced on the tripod, not broken now, and he could see the outer lock open and someone was standing there. Phil. Phil jumped down, not using the telescoping ladder, and ran toward him, and he heard him call. "It's okay now, Pete. We're headed straight up again, and we made it." He knew Phil was shouting, but his voice seemed very close and not strained as when someone shouts. Then Phil was there and he sat on the grass on the high green ground next to him and clasped his knees and smiled. Peter Henderson knew then where the ship was pointing.

He was dead before the reactor was fired by the delay tim-

ing gear and he never saw the light that came over the sky, or heard the sharp siren-like sound that grew and swallowed up the planet with its echo and that now would never end.

*Henderson-Davis expedition outcome in doubt. Upon the disappearance of Officers Henderson and Davis from Moon settlement 1, simultaneous with the then unexplained eruption in the crater Archimedes, a search revealed a file of documents and a diary left by the two for later discovery. The papers outlined the construction of an anti-gravity light mirroring star drive, constructed by them, and the theft of the cabin capsule section of Moon Ship 1. This served as explanation for object tracked by Earth tracking stations and later lost beyond range.*

*Coupling the star drive to the capsule, Henderson and Davis were attempting a star reach to Planet IX of Alpha Centauri. Claiming the light drive factor capable of the speed of light, their ETA was given as 4½ years hence, allowing time for acceleration to maximum. Radio astronomical stations, at Jodrell Bank, England, and Mt. Wilson, U. S. A., centered observa-*

*tion systems on area within advised calculated time, though by this time, little hope remained. Signals commenced, emanating from Alpha Centauri IX approximately 8 years 7 months from the date of the Archimedes eruption, signifying success of the Henderson-Davis reach.*

*Signals have continued so strongly during the past forty-three years that conjecture has approached certainty as to the habitability of Alpha Centauri IX. Under international supervision, work has continued unceasingly on reproduction of the Henderson-Davis star drive, but as of now, success has not been forthcoming.*

*Most interesting have been the hypotheses drawn on the method of the sustained Henderson-Davis signals, their MO in sustenance on an alien but livable world, and their motivation in the original venture beyond known spatial limits, in this, the solely recorded unauthorized expedition of International Space Attempts.*

*Journal of Extra-Terrestrial Commentaries; condensed from Catalogue 6, Unauthorized Expeditions—sole entry: Henderson-Davis.*

THE END

UNAUTHORIZED

49

*A strange tale of a perverted world, where  
one must learn by doing what is the right,  
what is the wrong; why people love; and  
just what, exactly is . . .*

# EXCELLENCE

By TOM PURDOM

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

**H**ALFWAY to the showdown Sandy and I stopped talking to each other. She wanted me to fight in the showdown. I wanted to fight, too, but I had made up my mind I wasn't going to.

When we got to Center City Recreation Hall we stood in the spectator's bunker.

My old gang, the Golden Horn Irregulars, paralyzer guns in their hands, were lined up on the floor to shoot it out with the Irish Warriors. Gentleman George had on his black suit and white gloves. Madame Marge wore her slickest cocktail dress. Reb wore his Confederate hat, Tex his scarf and sombrero, Bart his trench coat and slouch hat.

Once I would have been there, too, turtleneck sweater and beret, cigarette dangling from my lips. But now I was out of it. I was learning how to love. And at love school I had learned

I had to conquer my competitive drive

Conquer it I would, too. I'm Frenchy Wald. What I do, I do well. Better than anybody.

The buzzer sounded off. Guns whined.

Madame Marge moaned and slumped to the floor. I doubled over with her. One of the Warriors collapsed and then Walt, my replacement, and Tex. I could almost feel the gun in my hand as I shouted.

I remembered my last showdown, our first with the Warriors. I remembered the deadly touch of the gun, the swearing, the quick moans of the losers. And the tension and the wonderful excitement and the fury in my head. I'm Frenchy Wald. Die, you curs, die. For Frenchy hangs your scalps on his belt.

And I remembered, too, how I had been the last man standing on my side and how I had



laughed and shot from the hip at the Chief of the Warriors. And how Jim Strait, the Chief, had laughed, too, and shot. And I had fallen to the floor, to awaken an hour and a half later, numb and sick in the head.

"Frenchy! They're going to lose, Frenchy." Sandy tugged at me.

Out on the floor only Bart was left. Jim Strait took an easy, careful aim and that was the end of Bart.

I rocked on my heels and hugged Sandy.

"It was worse than last time," I said.

"They didn't have you," Sandy said.

I pulled her little blonde pony tail. "It's not that important," I said. "It's just a game. They'll be conscious in an hour."

Jim Strait swaggered toward the bunker and Marilyn Scott walked out on the floor to meet him. In her black dress and white hood she looked like a proud, slender ice princess. The two of them together hooked every eye that saw them.

He kissed her right there on the floor and then held her like a bright trophy won in battle.

"We'd better go," I said. I didn't want to talk to them.

"Marilyn looks very pretty," Sandy said.

"If you like the cold type," I said.

Sandy looked envious. Poor girl. All her life she had needed reassurance. She had bedded with a mob of men and boys

looking for it. Someday I'd give it to her, all the love she needed. I kissed her brow.

"C'mon," I said. "The show is over."

"Greetings, Frenchy," Jim shouted.

I waved. "Greetings, Jim."

He and Marilyn were walking toward us on their way out. My hand convulsed on Sandy's wrist. I had to stop and talk.

"Good showdown," I said.

"Thank you, Frenchy. We missed you."

She was there in front of me. I was looking down into her face, that wonderful, perfectly shaped face, all cold whites and contrasting blacks, like a Berkovitz painting. She was every image of perfection I had seen in my twenty-three years. She was the girl I had gone to love school to learn how to bed.

But that sickness love school had cured. Listen, self, I said. This girl is just a figure, a thing. You never wanted her. You wanted the proof of self-value she represents. Sandy is ardent, warm and hungry. Sandy is a person. You must learn to love Sandy.

"I'm through with showdowns," I said. "I sold my gun."

"A wise thing," Jim said. "Well, I'll see you two. So long, Sandy."

They walked away.

"Does every man look at her like that?" Sandy said.

"Well, she is nice to look at. I wouldn't want to live with her, though."



"I'll bet."

It was starting up again.  
"Let's breathe some air, lady."

We left the Center and strolled down the street. It was autumn then, the autumn of '09, and my turtleneck sweater felt just right. I pulled my beret down to my right eye and lit a cigarette.

"What time is it?" I said.

"Three o'clock," Sandy said.

"I'd better get home soon. I have to practice my violin."

"That's all right. I have a class at love school."

"May I walk you there?"

"If you want to."

"Of course I want to."

I squeezed her hand and we walked along in silence. She looked sour. I decided to give her relaxing time. Meantime I gawked at the buildings. I've lived in Philly all my life but the architecture still fascinates me. On Center City all the different schools and generations get jumbled up. Colonial and old brownstone walkups sit right beside glass and steel towers. And scattered in random spots the real modern stuff hooks your eye. I like the modern stuff best. Bright colors, crazy curves and angles, statues and paintings—more decoration than a man could appreciate in a lifetime.

"I like this town," I said.  
"Every corner a surprise."

The streets were full of cycles. We stopped at a corner and waited for the light.

"What are you thinking, Sandy?"

"Nothing you'd be interested in."

"Tell me. Please."

"I don't want to talk about it anymore."

We crossed the street. Two guys passed us talking at top speed. Something about Art vs. the Machine.

"How can we straighten it out if we don't talk about it?" I said.

"But all it does is upset me."

I squeezed her neck. "You're not being fair to me, lady. You said you would give me a fair chance. You said you were willing to have us explore each other."

"You're right. You're absolutely right."

"Then tell me what's wrong."

"Your friends need you, Frenchy. You should have been there."

"I'm through with show-downs."

"You can't desert your friends."

"You sound like you want me to get knocked numb."

"I don't want you to get hurt. If that's why you quit, then I'll forget the subject. I can understand that."

I threw my cigarette at the ground. Savagely.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean it that way."

"Then what did you mean?"

"I mean I just want to know why you quit. You used to look so happy out on the floor. I used to watch you and wonder how anyone could look so happy."

I couldn't tell her I was practicing love, that I was struggling with the discipline Mr. Lockhammer had worked out for me. If I ever learned to truly love, then I would tell her.

We stopped in front of the brick rowhouse that contains the Philadelphia School of Love.

"We're here," I said.

She paused in front of the steps. Sandy is blonde and slightly plump. But pretty. Her face shines and her body is all curves and soft places. She's not a statue like Marilyn Scott but a full-bodied, full-hearted girl with warmth and sincerity.

I squeezed her hand. "I like the way you look in that jacket. Trim and neat and healthy. Just like the autumn."

"Thank you."

I had told her that many times before. This time there was only a tiny attempt to smile.

"I won't see you tonight, will I, Frenchy?"

"Tonight's my night at the Elder Citizen's Club. What's on for you?"

"A lecture on anthropology."

"I guess I won't see you till the play tomorrow."

She didn't ask me to come over after I left the ECC. She was too shy and the last time I had bedded with her had been all wrong. She had been her old self, desperately struggling to obtain something you just can't get from sex, not really believing my declarations of love. I like sex as much as any man but

it's no good when there's that kind of personal tension.

"I wish we weren't so busy," she said. "But there's so much to do."

"Sandy."

"Yes?"

"It'll work out all right. I love you."

"Thank you."

"Don't look so sad."

"I'd better go, Frenchy."

"I'll phone you tonight."

"All right. 'Bye."

Just a few weeks before she had been continuously happy. That had been something. I, Frenchy Wald, can make a girl overflow with joy. But now I was losing her because I couldn't love her the way she needed to be loved.

The moon, pale in the afternoon sky, hooked my eye. I thought of the Lunar bases and how it would feel to be a spaceman. To be at the top, to know you were the best the human race had. That would solve everything. My hunger for status would be satisfied and I would be free to love.

But I'll never be a spaceman. There's nothing wrong with me, just not enough right. All I can do is work my four-hour shift at Hamburg Travel and be a dilettante. A "gentleman of culture" as they say.

Well, all right then. I'll be the best damned dilettante in town. And if that means learning how to love—I'll outlove anybody you can name!

I live in a room on the fifteenth floor of a black and yellow residential tower. If you live in Philly, you know the place.

That was where I went to practice love. Mr. Lockhammer had suggested I try loves less complicated than the love of a woman. We had decided on my violin and a three-legged cat named Macarthy.

I play the violin very well. I learned to play it because of this big competition thing. With my violin I could play with one of the best string quartets in town. I could hear the audience applaud and speak with authority on music.

I would have gone on that way, if I hadn't gone to love school. Love school is a new institution and it has its faults but it taught me a lot. I went there because I wanted to improve my technique and bed Marilyn Scott, thus becoming the top lover in the city in my age group.

Anyway, after two semesters I learned something more than technique. I learned that all my life I've been doing things because I want to raise my opinion of myself and hear other people applaud me. Which may be a good motive for many things, but it isn't love.

I also became convinced love is something important. If you can't love, you're a mediocrity. And that I refuse to be. Down with the second rate.

So I quit the string quartet and the Irregulars. Every day I observed Macarthy and played

the violin. I tried to play only for myself, for the sake of the music, not for the applause of an audience.

And I started courting Sandy, who is a fine girl and perfect for me, but who has all the prestige value of a four-year-old cycle.

I got out the violin and tuned it. Macarthy lay sleeping in the netting of my bed. He was crippled and ugly and not a possession one could boast about. But I had observed the old humbug carefully and discovered he had quality. He made me laugh but I respected him, too. He had convinced me that however he had lost his leg, he had lost it honorably.

I put the music on the stand and started playing. Just as Mr. Lockhammer had instructed, with total concentration on the music itself and my reactions to it.

I warmed up with a short piece by Mozart and then started on Nikolai's *Dream of Space*. I know that's scored for drums and violins, but most of it comes through with just the violin. I listened to the sound coming from my bow. I went where the music wanted to take me. I heard the beat of the composer's heart and the way he felt about the men who venture into space. Nikolai had been younger than me then and still hadn't left Earth, so I knew how he felt.

And then, at the end of a tricky passage, I thought: I'm getting good. Wait'll they hear me play this.

I could never heave my best violin. But I put it down as hard as my pride of possession would let me. I stood in the middle of the room and thought how nice it would be to choke the cat.

I hate you, Macarthy. I hate the music. I hate Sandy. I hate you all because you've set up something I can't climb. I hate me.

I left the tower and walked the twelve blocks to love school. When I pushed open Mr. Lockhammer's door he was standing in front of a painting, a perfect reproduction of a Berkovitz.

"Frenchy! Do you have to barge in like that? Don't I get to relax?"

"I can't do it," I said. "You're asking too much."

Mr. Lockhammer is a big, cigar smoking man who's just a little too sure psychology explains everything. But his pet theories don't interfere with his teaching. He's too disciplined and he never asks questions. He sits there as poker-faced as the Universe and you have to figure out what you need to know yourself. But he'll answer anything you ask him.

"What do you people want from me?" I said. "What do I have to do?"

"You know what the answer is to both questions—nothing."

"You know what I mean. Isn't there a limit to what I have to do to be a good lover? I was sitting up there doing fine with the violin when all at once

I thought about the audience. What's wrong with that?"

"Not a thing. I told you when we started this that a normal competitive spirit is fine. In fact, in your case your competitive drive is what is making you go to such lengths to be a psychically whole man. We're not trying to stop you from competing and striving. We're trying to help you free other emotions."

"I don't have the other emotions."

"Everybody does. Quit asking for reassurance."

"But why can't I enjoy one thing without using it as a prestige symbol? What's wrong with me?"

"If you want to know why you have this problem, you should put yourself on a psych doctor's waiting list."

"You know I can't afford that. Even if I could, it would be ten years before I got my turn. I can't wait."

"Then you'll have to work it out yourself."

"I can't do it by myself! This treatment is a lot of junk. You're a phony to suggest it."

He shrugged. "Then quit. That's your affair. You pay me and I give you advice. Sympathy isn't in the contract."

I lit a cigarette and stared at the painting. It was *Woman in June Rain*, reproduced by the Blake process. It must have cost him a year's savings. After awhile I calmed down.

"What am I doing wrong with Sandy?"

"So that's it. Give me some more information."

"I'm losing her. She's given me almost everything but she won't say she loves me. And now she's getting more like her old self and the whole relationship's going sour. She's jealous of Marilyn, she complains because I wasn't in today's showdown. What am I doing wrong?"

"You're not giving her the kind of love she wants."

"I know that! But what does she want?"

"That's something I can't answer, Frenchy. I can't know her as well as you can. Only you can answer that one."

"But what can I do?"

"Just keep at it and what you're looking for will come." You've got what it takes."

"I came for advice, not reassurance."

"That's all I can tell you."

I started to go. "Listen, what are you after? What's your big aim?"

"I have many aims."

"I know, but how would you put the big one?"

"All right. Sure. To excel."

"Just like me? What do you mean by excelling?"

"Doing well everything it's in my nature to do."

"Did you have anything you had to learn when you were my age?"

"Sure I did. I had to learn I couldn't solve everybody's problems for them. That's a hard thing to learn, son, when you're

sensitive to pain. As hard as what you've got."

So I got something out of him besides release. Perhaps I had gotten everything out of love school they could give me. But where else could I go for help?

I had dinner at a sidewalk cafeteria on Market Street. Plankton steak and a pretty good wine. Just as I was leaving the manager broke down. I hung around for awhile and watched the technicians work on it. I didn't understand much of what they did but it got my mind off me.

When I got home from my volunteer night at the Elder Citizen's Club I stuck my head in the reading machine. After an hour of gobbling up copies of *Scientific World* and *Humanity* I figured I was tired enough to fall asleep. I was, but only to a dream in which Jim Strait made love to Sandy while I pursued an uncatchable Marilyn.

When I woke up I remembered I had forgotten to call Sandy. But I had slept through the alarm and I just had time to get to my work. And at work we had a sudden out of season busy spell and I didn't get away from the Travel Computer until my shift ended at noon.

Sandy happened to be home. "I'm sorry I didn't call," I said.

"I waited up for you. You should have called."

"I had a bad time at the ECC. When I got home I just wanted to sleep."

"What happened?"

"You know how it is there. All those old people who never learned how to use their time. This old woman started taking her anger out on me. It wore me out."

"That's too bad, Frenchy. You should have called me. You never call me when you're feeling bad."

"Yes, I do. I have lots of times."

"Not for someone who's supposed to be in love."

"Damn! You're right," I said. "I'm sorry."

She needed love so bad. She was so timid and afraid she wasn't up to standard.

"Tell me you love me," she said.

"I love you madly."

"Thank you."

"How do you feel?"

"All right."

But her voice said she didn't.

"I'll see you at dinner," I said. "And after that the play."

"Where do you want to go afterward?"

"Why don't we go to the Horn?"

"I have a new tape I want you to hear. It's some fifteenth century trumpet music."

"Do you work tomorrow?"

"No."

"Neither do I. We'll go to your place after the Horn."

After I hung up, I realized I was heading for trouble. The evening as planned had only one logical conclusion. And if I didn't make love to her, or if I did and



it was like last time, that could be the end of everything. But how could I have avoided it?

Maybe we would both be out of NoPreg pills. Maybe we would stay up late and be too tired. Something might happen. Sandy, you deserve better than this.

I spent the afternoon at fencing class and then stopped by the Young Conservative Club for a little political talk. When I got home I didn't want to go near the violin so I turned on the reading machine and re-read the first half of *Don Quixote*. By then it was time to get ready for the evening. I spent a healthy fifteen minutes in the refresher unit and then, clean and perfumed, put on a fresh sweater and a brown evening poncho. A red beret was my final attempt to bolster my spirits.

We had dinner together on Market Street and I managed to make her laugh. It took an effort of will from me—I learned a lot in Mr. Goldstine's course in Yogi and Self-Discipline—but by the time we got to the theater Sandy seemed almost relaxed.

The play was pretty good but not for me. The hero was a great lover and all the girls in Moscow wanted him to bed them. He was everything I had wanted to be before I started love school. He was everything I was trying not to want to be.

We left the play and walked through town to the Horn. The quickest way led us along the edge of the Carnival. Sandy

pressed against me as the flashing lights and taped voices tickled our subconscious minds. Beside the giant Pinwheel a gang of swagger boys in old-fashioned tweed jackets watched us dreamily. A jet screamed among the stars, loaded with passengers and bound through the night for California or Moscow or some place.

Moscow. I would never be the guy in the play. I would never see the young bucks envy me or the slim young girls hungry after me. And maybe that was a childish dream but it was what I had always wanted and apparently I couldn't change.

I tried, I thought. But after what's bound to happen in her room, I can chalk up another failure.

"Let's hurry up," Sandy said. "I hate the Carnival."

"So do I. We're almost to the park."

In the park a spaceman passed us with a dark brunette leaning on his arm. He walked like he ruled Creation and the girl looked honored to be with him.

I hugged Sandy.

"You're nice," I said. "What a wife you'll make. I can just see you in the kitchen with the kids around you."

"Thank you."

But you could tell by her face and her voice that it didn't mean what it had meant once. She knew where I was. I was with the spaceman and the girl she'd never be.

Mr. Lockhammer says people weren't always as sensitive to each other's feelings as we are today. I sometimes think they were better off.

If I could have bedded a girl like Marilyn just once. Or been a spaceman or a great musician or a poet. Anything but one more hungry, unknown guy in the big, uncaring Universe.

The coffee house was crowded but we found a table for two and ordered. There were lots of people there I had to wave to but none of my close friends.

"I wonder where the gang is," I said.

"It's a little early. Why don't we order?"

"All right."

We ordered coffee and sat in silence. I like to watch the people in coffee houses. The bright clothes, the shifting colored lights, the talk and the smoke. A good coffee house is a stage and if you look at it right you can make it any good place in any time.

Reb came in and stopped by our table. He still looked groggy.

"Pleasure, Frenchy."

"Pleasure," I said. "Too bad about yesterday."

"We could have used you."

"I'm sorry. But I told you how I feel about showdowns."

"Yeah. Ever since you got hit."

I stiffened. My friend Reb. My comrade in arms. But he left before I could answer.

"He thinks I'm afraid," I said.

She touched my arm. "He's not the only one."

"He's just feeling bad because they lost. He'll get over it."

"Frenchy—"

Jim Strait came in with Marilyn Scott. She was wearing a red jacket with a black hood. They looked like the spaceman and his girl. I followed them as they walked to a table and only then did I notice all the Warriors were in the place.

I looked at Sandy. She was watching Jim and Marilyn.

"Look at the crowd around them," she said.

"The new hero. They'll have another hero next week."

Sandy was facing the door. I saw her raise her hand to wave and then lower it. I turned to see who had come in. Marge and Bart. I waved. They went to Reb's table like they hadn't seen me.

"They didn't even wave," I said. "Some friends I have."

"I want to go home, Frenchy."

"What?"

"I want to go home. I can't take this. I'm sorry."

"You can't take what?"

"Being snubbed."

She pressed the red button on the service panel and the serving cart began to weave through the crowd with our check.

"Please don't argue with me here," she said.

"I'll see you home."

"You don't have to."

Her cheeks were red and her eyes were shiny with the hint of tears.

"Does it matter to you that much?" I said, trying to speak softly.

She nodded.

"It shouldn't. What other people think shouldn't matter."

"I can't help it, Frenchy."

The cart stopped beside our table. Sandy picked up the check and fumbled for change, unable to see clearly through the tears.

"Wait a moment." I said.

"Why?"

"I want to think."

Now I knew what she wanted. She wanted all the things I was trying not to want. And how, being that kind of person, could she love a man with no friends and no status? She *couldn't* love me. To her, I was a guy who was taking second best because he couldn't have the best.

I looked at Jim Strait. I knew how to give Sandy what she wanted. But to do it I would have to lose the war I was fighting with myself.

I *wanted* to fight Jim. Did I have to let the tiger loose to make Sandy happy? To make Sandy mine?

Self, stop rationalizing. You are making up excuses so you can do what you want to do and shouldn't do. You do this and you'll never be sure what your motivations were.

"I have to go, Frenchy. Please let me go."

But could I let it end like this? At the Golden Horn, in the middle of an evening? I remembered how she had bubbled

with life once and all because of me.

My head hurt. I tried to go over it again. I wasn't supposed to showdown or compete because I had to learn how to love. I wanted to showdown and was likely to make up any reason to convince myself I should. But Sandy needed the prestige and status I had been trying not to seek.

There was nothing solid in it. It was all confused. The only solid thing was Sandy. Sandy and her needs. And the bright thing we could have between us —before it was too late.

She pulled herself away and started for the door.

To walk through the park, I thought. To walk through the park and have her look at me with a face full of love and pride. To make her laugh.

"Stay and watch," I said as I grabbed her.

She didn't turn around. "What are you doing?"

"Watch."

I started toward Strait's table. The old wild thing came alive. Oh, I'll bring you down, my boy. Your scalp will hang from my belt. But not just for me. To please my lady love.

"Greetings, Jimmy-O."

"Pleasure, Frenchy. How's the violin?"

"Fine. Which Warriors survived yesterday's encounter?"

"Jerry, Joey and myself."

"How sweet. All your names begin with J. I'm the last survivor of the Golden Horn

Irregulars. I think we should meet at once to end the battle."

"Three against one? Why don't you just shoot yourself and save us the effort?"

"Don't be so confident. Full power guns. In a dark room. Three against me."

He shook his head. "Full power guns are dangerous. You can get a concussion."

"It's my last showdown. Frenchy leaves in style."

"Sorry."

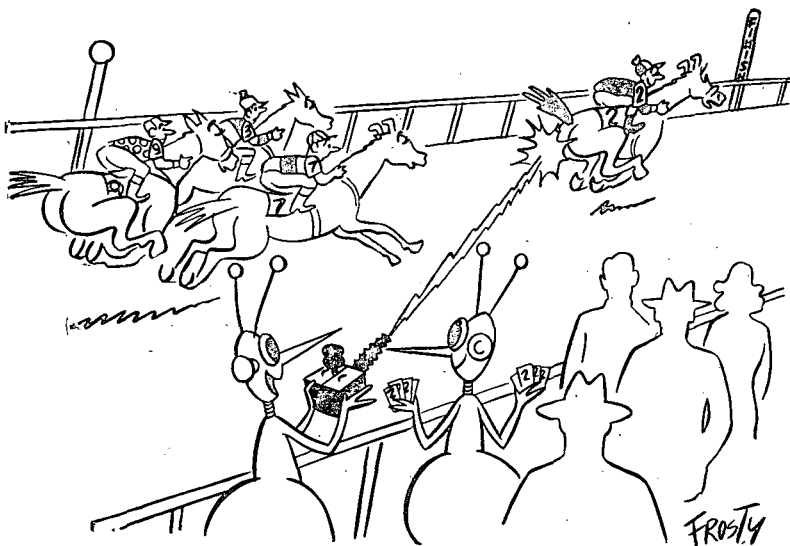
There was a dish of gooey Swedish sherbert on the table.

I picked it up and threw it in his face. He stood up snarling. An hour later they faced me on the showdown floor.

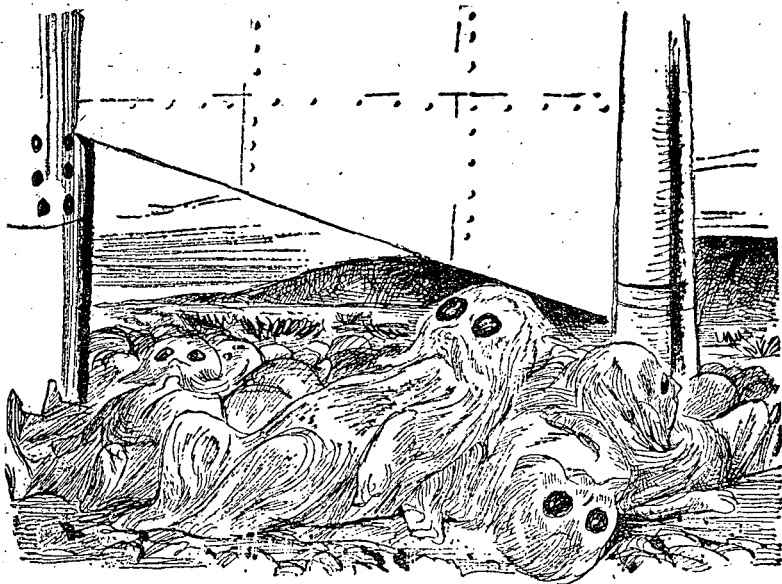
Just before the lights switched off, the spectators filed out. Sandy went last, after Marilyn. She stood in the door and looked at me like I was the next best thing to God. I blew her a kiss and drew a big I love you in the air. Timidly her lips formed three soundless words.

I laughed and turned on my gun. I'm Frenchy Wald, gentleman. What I love, I love well.

#### THE END



"I'm glad I brought along my magnetic ray machine!"



# THEY LIKE US

By JOHN BRUDY

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

*The little beasts were  
all around the ship  
... watching ...  
waiting ... sucking  
out life and death ...*

ONCE, twice, three times, at suicidal speed, the ship caromed off the thin fringes of upper air. Three times the tortured thing and the two tortured

men inside fought back into the grim emptiness of space. Silent, preparing itself for the next incandescent assault, it hurtled halfway around the planet. At

last, as the men committed themselves, the ship nosed bravely downward.

Fifty miles deep the atmosphere waited. It began to claw at the ship . . . gently at first . . . then with terrible, erosive power.

Screaming, encrusted with fire, the ship flew once around the world. Then it slowed, cooled and at last fell into the sea.

Major Pete Collier had been putting pilots back together for eleven years. Not the sort of work to mellow a man, but doctors are a special breed of schizophrenic. Pete lived his two lives, human and professional, with a grace born of long practice and stern discipline. It was not always pleasant, he reflected. Not pleasant, for instance, to remember the freckled, crewcut kid named Chuck Norstad who Pete had taught to fish for tarpon. It hurt to remember this time, as the crash launch sped toward Patrick Base Hospital, that it was bringing the same Chuck Norstad . . . his crewcut scalp torn half off his skull and the freckles obscured by the sick purple of deceleration hemorrhage.

It had been a long dive into the Gulf Stream. All the way from Mars.

Pete worked steadily for eight hours just roughing in the toughest phases. Then he turned the whole thing over to the relief team, washed up and groped his way toward his office.

He found Linda Norstad waiting for him.

She had appeared there many times during the last few days, always dry-eyed, always supremely rational in a totally unwomanly way that both puzzled and gratified Pete Collier. This time she had brought her son, a blond crewcut boy of six who looked amazingly like the captain of the first spaceship to land on Mars. The toy in his hand was a replica of the launching vehicle that six weeks before had hurled his father beyond the sky above Cape Canaveral.

She did not have to ask Pete any questions at all. They had known each other too long for that.

"It's not as bad as the worst I've seen," he said. "These things are complicated . . . there are so many kinds of damage, all subject to things like anoxia and God knows what. But he's going to pull through, Linda. He's a tough one."

"How's Vince O'Donnell?"

Pete shrugged. "About the same. More breakage. He'll make it."

"Pete," Linda said suddenly, just as though it were a new question, "why didn't they send us messages?"

He had been over this with her many times. He wondered briefly if she were growing dangerously preoccupied with it. Sometimes a single obsession could cling like a leech to an otherwise perfectly adjusted personality. Chuck had always sent

her messages, she kept saying. He always wrote, always phoned, always telegraphed . . . he had never failed her. Now there had been six solid weeks of nothing. It was not like Chuck, she had said over and over.

Pete decided to lie.

"We think their transmitter was damaged when they landed up there. It must have been that . . . there's no other explanation."

She was not satisfied. "We heard the ship's beacon all the time, Pete. Loud and clear, till I was sick of the thing."

"The beacon transmitted automatically."

Stubbornly she turned the problem over in her mind. "Someone said they could have keyed the beacon with Morse code. Why didn't they do that?"

"That's a silly newspaper story, Linda," said Pete. "The beacon is a sealed unit . . . they probably didn't have time to tinker with it."

Her voice became suddenly suspicious. "Why not, Pete?"

Collier cursed silently. Why in hell should Linda, of all people, have to start breaking up when the main problem was finished?"

"Why not?" she repeated. "What kept them from it? What was going on?"

"Look, Linda," Pete said desperately, "I just don't know these things. We're going to talk to both of them just as soon as we can. We'll find out then. He's back. He's going to recover . . . that's the important thing." To

divert her he asked if she'd had any sleep.

"A little." She relaxed and managed a wan smile. "About two hours' worth this morning."

Pete returned her smile, like interest on an investment.

"You need more than that. Pull up your sleeve." As Pete took a syringe from the desk drawer, he added, "I'll send Chuckie home with one of the corpsmen."

She winced a little, then sighed, already beginning to relax with the certainty of oncoming sleep. "This has been one hell of a day, Pete," she said, pressing her fists into her eyes. "I don't have many like it in me."

"You can use this cot right here in my office," he said. "Just sleep. Forget everything."

She lay straight and still under the blanket, staring at the white ceiling. Finally, she said, drowsily, "Pete, that piece of paper they found in the cabin of the ship when they pulled the boys out . . . what did it say again?"

"Now, don't worry," said Pete, trying to make his voice soothing. "It's not important. Just sleep."

But Linda didn't seem to hear him.

"It was Chuck's handwriting . . . I could tell that." Her voice was a slow, drugged mumbling. "But what a strange thing for him to write . . . '*we killed thousands of them*' . . . a funny thing . . . not like Chuck at all."

Her voice trailed away. "You



know, Pete," she whispered very faintly. "Sometimes I feel that Chuck isn't here at all. I feel like he never came back."

The drug finally hit completely, and she slept, solid and unmoving as though she were dead.

The tape recorder running continuously at the bedside of Chuck Norstad did not catch a single whisper from him for two and a half days. Quite simply, it was sensitive to the wrong frequencies. Shrunken and shriveled deep within him, far below the threshold of speech, was the remnant of Chuck Norstad that could still identify itself as him. But the remnant only contemplated itself, like a paralyzed mouse in a tiny mirrored room. There were words there, in the shrill silence, but they only ran back and forth in little hops like playing ping-pong on the top of a cigar box.

After two and a half days Chuck Norstad opened his eyes . . . and could not see.

The ward became an island.

There was a thing called Security which sprang up as though conjured by a sorcerer. Security had sticks and bayonets and guns. Security drove all before it; the newsmen, the curious, the unneeded. Like an infestation of vermin they were driven back and held, jumping and frothing along a perimeter that left the ward and Chuck's room in peace.

When Linda learned that

Chuck was blind she finally wept. Her man, who had looked upon the landscape of a new world, now could not see at all . . . and at last her composure dissolved under an avalanche of futility.

In numb silence she found her way to the street where the car waited with little Chuck. She sat quietly in the front seat and counted the palm trees that lined the hospital drive. Twenty-four. One for each year of her husband's life. She opened the dash compartment, got a sucker and gave it to her son.

"Let's go home, Chuckie," she said. "Everything's going to be all right."

The room was cleared. The recorders were started. Pete Collier sat beside the bed in a straight-backed hospital chair.

"I'm going to ask you some questions, Chuck," he said. "Make your answers short, and tell me when you're tired."

Chuck Norstad moved slightly, turning his head toward the sound of Pete's voice. "I'll try," he said. "My voice sounds funny as hell."

"Anoxia does funny things to the speech centers sometimes. You'll be better tomorrow and as good as ever before long."

"Do you think I'll ever see, Pete?"

"There's an outside chance. Don't worry about it."

"How's Linda taking it?"

"Very gung ho, Chuck. She's a brave woman."

"I'm glad. I shouldn't ever

have gone. It was damned unfair. I knew that before we left the orbit station. But that would have been a hell of a time to chicken out, wouldn't it?"

"Maybe not. We're changing our philosophy on these things." Pete adjusted the microphone a little closer to Chuck's lips. "What happened on the landing?"

"It wasn't any picnic. The ship flew good, after we got into the atmosphere. We were down to ten miles before we began to feel it."

"Could you maneuver?"

"Pretty well. After the wings took hold, we made three or four circles looking for a smooth spot."

"Have any trouble finding one?"

"Not much choice. Terrain was flat, but stony. And covered with something like real short, scrubby mesquite."

"No damage?"

"Nothing Vince couldn't fix."

"How long before you got out?"

"About six hours. We took a lot of environmentals. The deal looked tough, but manageable. By then it was night. We got into the sleeping bag and slept till about four the next morning."

"How cold was it?"

"About 85 below when we woke up. We stayed in the bag till the sun started hitting the cabin. Then it warmed up fast."

"You got out of the ship right away?"

"We ate first. After the outside thermometer got up to zero, we equalized pressure and got out. We felt pretty heavy after eighteen days of low G acceleration."

Pete chuckled. "Didn't the dry runs out at the orbit station prepare you for this?"

Chuck shook his head. "The trip was different."

"In what way?"

"More boring. More frightening. Lord, it's so empty for so long, Pete . . . I can't begin to tell you." He paused and moistened his puffy lips. "We wrestled two or three hours a day on the way out, so we were in good shape physically. We didn't have any trouble getting around."

"What did you do?"

"Well, the first thing we tried to do was find what native materials there were. We wanted something combustible and something structural. Something with useful characteristics. The mesquite was hard to cut, but it was strong. But it was gnarly and not much use, and it wouldn't burn. The rocks were mostly a sort of crumbly sandstone. It wasn't a very productive day."

"What was your first reaction to the environment?"

Chuck didn't answer at once, and Pete repeated the question.

"I guess," Chuck said at last, "you'd say it was . . . disappointment. I know it was with me. Just lousy disappointment."

Pete Collier leaned forward intently. "Just why was this?"

"Well, it was so much like Earth that . . . oh, somehow, it seemed to be a fake. Like the whole planet was masquerading as the Earth. It was like being lost in a desert. In a desert without any air. Both Vince and I had strong impulses to get back into the ship at all times."

"Did you do so?"

"Quite a lot, yes. Especially on the first and second days."

"And after that?"

"We either got used to it or shamed each other out of it."

"Why didn't you communicate?"

Chuck slowly flexed his fingers.

"I'm not quite sure," he said slowly. "We ran the ship's beacon all the time. Did you hear it?"

"Sure, we heard it. It was heard by more people than you can count. But we were waiting for messages."

"Yes, we knew that," said Chuck. "We started to set up for that. We got out the section of the hull that was to be used as a reflector and started to set it up. We kept getting sidetracked all the time. Vince cut his hand, and we watched the wound for half a day for signs of trouble."

His voice was perceptibly weaker as he continued. "It's a hell of a thing, Pete, thinking you may have to cut off a friend's hand if it gets an infection you can't stop."

"What else?"

"Oh, trivial things . . . maybe they were compulsive . . . I

don't know. Like my dropping the transmitter in the dirt. We had to tear it all down and clean it."

"You think you meant to drop it?"

"It was an excuse to get back into the ship." He paused and groped for words. "It wasn't that we were yellow or anything like that, Pete. Neither of us seemed to be quite himself."

"I see." Pete paused reflectively. "Did you ever get the radio into working order?"

Chuck's voice was barely audible.

"I think so. It seemed to be working. But by then it was late in the afternoon. Earth was out of line of sight. We never got to try it, because that was the afternoon the other thing happened. We kind of forgot about you people down here, somehow."

"What other thing was that, Chuck?"

For a moment Pete was almost sorry he had asked the question. Chuck Norstad was tense and trembling. His throat and mouth convulsed in a desperate effort to find words.

Finally, in an almost inaudible whisper, he said, "For the first time, Pete, we saw the . . . people. We hadn't thought too much about this, and when we saw them . . . well, we went back into the ship again. While we were in there trying to make up our minds what to do, they tore the transmitter all to hell and carried off the pieces."

The tape was copied with great care. Two reels were locked in the Q vault, two were sent to Washington, and the original was played back to the full Space Medicine staff. Then it was played again. And again.

Old von Görke, the SAMUSAF team chief, was apoplectic. In an almost incomprehensible German accent he roared that this was the last time a two-man spaceship crew would ever go anywhere.

"Mein Gott, twenty-five men ve haf in the orbit station, und in a week *they* go crazy mit nod-dinks to do! In vun lousy week!"

Pete Collier was inclined to agree. He conferred with the pathology staff, voted to give Chuck Norstad six hours of rest, music and his first solid food.

Then he started over with a fresh tape.

"You were telling me about the Martians, Chuck. What do you know about them?"

Chuck seemed stronger and more animated this time.

"They are small bipeds, almost like lemurs except they're bigger than that and they don't have any tails. But, Pete, they have the most beautiful fur you've ever seen . . . about the color of silver and so fine and dense . . . I can't begin to describe it."

"Intelligent?"

Chuck nodded. "All the points we were briefed to look for were present . . . organization, cooperation, discussion. Their eyes were large and attentive. Their range of facial expression was

as great as ours. They showed constant curiosity."

"Did they speak?"

"Constantly amongst themselves. Sometimes they looked directly at us and spoke . . . and Vince talked back to them all the time. Toward the last he talked to them more than he did anything else. They seemed to enjoy it so much we hated to disappoint them when they gathered around us. But they never did anything like drawing pictures of the solar system and things like that, and they never responded to our efforts to do these things. They just came to the ship and looked at it. They watched us, chatted amongst themselves, never got in the way, never allowed us to approach close enough to touch them."

"Anything else?"

He hesitated for a moment. Then he said, slowly, "Yes, Pete; on about the third day after they first appeared we began to notice something that later got to be sort of . . . terrible. Whenever we did anything outside the ship, like fixing something, they would watch. If we were having trouble, they would make little moaning sounds. If we succeeded, or especially if we were pleased with our success, they seemed somehow to be pleased, too . . . but in a terribly intense way. They would almost have little paroxysms of joy, especially when we laughed at them." Chuck's lips widened in a gro-

tesque, puffy smile of reminiscence.

"Oh, they had a real feel for us all right. When we hurt our fingers they cringed and whimpered. When we ate, they would lick their furry little chops. Once they laughed . . . I guess you'd call it that. They saw Vince combing his hair and they roared like it was some big joke. They had a real feel for us, Pete . . . for me and Vince. They liked us. And they hated to see us go."

Pete interrupted. "You said something about this all turning out to be terrible, Chuck. What was so bad about it?"

"We didn't really notice it at first, but later Vince decided to go off along a little ridge to see what was on the other side. He got out of sight of the ship while I was doing something, and when I looked up, I couldn't see him."

Chuck paused and swallowed several times. When he spoke again, he seemed strangely moved, as though he were on the verge of tears.

"I can't really say how this all came about . . . you get pretty close to a guy when you're that alone. I was scared as hell that something had happened to Vince. I ran up the hill in big long jumps and on the other side I saw old Vince coming along as if nothing was wrong.

"But I was triggered off something fierce, Pete. I was never so scared. I was hysterical. I ran over to him and threw my arms around him like he was a long

lost brother. It was like sitting up in your coffin and being told that everything was all right . . . that you were going to live after all. I hung onto his hand like a little boy while we walked back to the ship. I was sort of babbling, and he kept reassuring me that everything was OK and that he hadn't realized that he was out of sight and all that.

"Then we saw the other thing . . . the people. There were nine of them beside the ship. They had been watching me just before I missed Vince and started to run. They were all dead. All of them . . . dead."

Chuck suddenly began to tremble until the hospital bed shook.

"Did you ever go hunting, Pete? Did you ever shoot a whole batch of rabbits and bring them home and lay them in a row on the ground, all limp and soft? That was the way it was . . . just like nine little dead rabbits."

Pete cranked up the head of the bed so Chuck could suck water out of a glass. "Want to wait?" he asked.

"Hell, no," Chuck responded huskily. "I just wish I could see this room, Pete. All I can see any more is that damned mesquite . . . miles of it. I can't even visualize what the Earth looks like."

"What did you do next?"

Chuck drank half a glass of water and then started in again.

"Well, we went inside the ship.

It was warm in there with the sun shining on the hull. We stripped off that damned arctic clothing and sat around trying to figure out what had happened. We kept watch out the port and in about two hours we noticed that there were a lot of them outside. Vince got the binoculars, and we discovered there were hundreds of them. We talked for a while without getting anywhere. Finally, Vince started playing one of the tapes . . . something real sweet and soothing that was good medicine for the way I felt. I was terribly beat. All out of proportion to the work I'd done. Just as I was about to fall asleep I glanced out the port.

"Right then I got this feeling that . . . well, I knew what was happening without really understanding how I knew or anything. But the little people were all lying down, too. Some were stretched out against rocks . . . some with their heads in each others' laps and like that. Well, Pete, this funny feeling came over me, and I sat up in the hammock. Outside, all the people also sat up or began to move around . . . sort of nervous. Right there I almost cracked up, because I suddenly knew that it had been my fear about losing Vince that had killed them.

"Those little people were sharing our moods, Pete. We must have been an overpowering source of emotional potential to them. They didn't seem able to leave us alone, for all the danger

we represented. No matter what happened they seemed to welcome it. They showed no grief over the nine dead ones, for instance. Not even concern. They just ignored them. They acted as though they were . . . well, sort of *addicted* to us. They just liked us; we knew that. Like some people like dope. They just wanted us to entertain them . . . or satisfy their craving or whatever it was."

Chuck stopped talking and made several convulsive efforts to swallow. "You know," he said finally, "I hope Vince is dead."

At least, Pete thought to himself, he can't see me. Can't see the look on my face. He caught a deep, silent breath.

"Because, if he's dead, they can never do that to him again. They can never do it to me either, as long as I never go back to Mars. But Vince would go back; that's the kind of a stubborn Irish jerk he is."

Chuck suddenly pulled himself up on one elbow and turned his head toward Pete almost as though he could see directly through the bandages that swathed his eyes.

"Look, Pete . . . Vince and I knew each other since we were kids. We understood all this psychological crap about 'affinities' and 'identifications' and all that. We even talked about it sometimes. All it means is that you like the guy, and you get to the point sooner or later of realizing that there's nothing you would not do for this person if he ask-

ed you. Only thing is, Pete, it has to be him that asks you . . . not somebody else.

"Well, as we sat there in the ship watching these people outside, sort of wondering what the hell was going to happen next, I noticed Vince was crying. Now this was a hell of a funny thing, you see, and I turned around to ask him what was wrong. He grabbed me by the arms like his fingers were made of steel. He was blubbing and trying to talk and not saying anything you could understand. But I knew what he was trying to say. I knew why, too. I wasn't sore, you understand; just sorry and kind of sick.

"I jerked loose and gave him one on the jaw. I guess it saved our lives, Pete. I'm sure of it. I helped him get up and clean his face. He never said a word . . . just moved like he was suddenly struck dumb.

"Then, maybe ten minutes later, we took another look out the port. They were close to the ship . . . all around it . . . a tight mass of them . . . hundreds, I guess. And they were looking at us.

"Pete, did you ever go to a burlesque show? And just as the star stripper is about to drop the last veil did you think to turn around and inspect the audience? That was the look on those faces, Pete; like the audience at a burlesque show. Right then, we knew we had to get out of there."

Chuck lay back down on the pillow and put his one good hand behind his head. "By the time it got dark that day we had worked up some orbits that showed promise of being useful. We had a first approximation of the fuel distance problem. We extended the erector tripod and got power to it so it would be ready to set the ship up in launch position the next morning. There was suddenly only one thing on our minds . . . the Earth was getting three miles farther away every second, and we were scared.

"We worked like hell till midnight. Then we talked for a while. Vince turned on the outside lights. The people were still there . . . the ground was covered with them as far as the lights reached. We congratulated ourselves on having gotten on to what they were trying to do in time to get out without being hurt.

"Finally, we decided to get some sleep. Vince looked like he hadn't had a wink in three days. But he balked at getting into the sleeping bag."

"'You are the pilot of this beast,' he said. 'You need the rest.'"

I reminded him that we had been sharing this sleeping bag for three weeks. He just shook his head. 'With that crowd of voyeurs outside?' That stubborn jerk. 'I want no more cracks on the jaw today,' he said. He put his outside clothes back on and stretched out on the floor. It



must have been uncomfortable as hell, but he wanted it that way. I gave him quite a razzing about how safe his virtue would be and all that, but he was like a stone wall. So, finally, I gave up and went to sleep."

Chuck Norstad said nothing more for a long time. Then he drew a deep shuddering breath, and Pete realized that he was sleeping. He turned off the recorder, took out the tape and went softly out.

Pete gave the tape to von Görke. "You'll know where to send this when you hear it." He went to his desk and pulled out a bottle of Scotch. "Let's drink up some of this stuff, shall we, von?"

Von Görke's eyes darted at Pete.

"He iss in vorse trouble stil, ja?"

"Yes. Quite bad. He's not quite finished." Pete gulped the liquor. "Von," he said suddenly, "I want you to get the best eye people you can get your hands on. Get them here. I think there is a good chance for his sight . . . but I don't want any mistakes."

"Ja, ja, I know," von Görke rumbled. "He iss seeing the wrong world."

"If he can't see this one soon, I think he'll die."

Pete steered von Görke toward the audition room where the select staff waited to hear the playback. Then he phoned Linda with excuses for another six

hours' delay. At the end of that time he sat again beside Chuck Norstad's bed.

"Now, Chuck," he began, "tell me about the return trip."

Chuck's voice was much better.

"The trip was fine. A lot of time spent at zero G, but you get used to that. It was just dull, like any trip outside. It was the things just before takeoff that I wanted to tell you about, Pete. That was the real weird part. I guess I fell off to sleep right in the middle of it." He stopped short and thought for some time before going on.

"You know," he finally resumed, "I never thought about it till now, but I dropped off to sleep like a stone that night. Funny, too, because I was nervous and shook up as hell, and half mad at Vince for being such a jerk.

"Anyway, I drifted off to sleep. And right away, it seemed, I got started on this dream. It seemed to be I was standing right in the middle of a huge crowd, Pete; like at a football game or a prize fight. Everyone was looking at me . . . thousands of them . . . the crowd seemed like a huge, dark mass that was all eyes . . . all big round eyes that never blinked . . . just watched.

"The crowd was making noise . . . a sort of expectant sound . . . like they expected me to do something that pleased them, and I remember that just for what seemed like a minute or so

I was sort of at a loss what to do. But I knew if I tried I could perform for them . . . I knew I could please them . . . I had to please them. Because after the performance I knew I could go out among them and be their friend.

"Then, real suddenly, as happens in dreams, I was walking in a big field and there in the distance, like a tiny little speck of light, someone was coming toward me.

"I could see that it was a girl, and as she came closer, I saw that it was Linda. She came running to me almost as if she were flying. She came near me and stopped, almost like she didn't recognize me.

"Then, suddenly, she smiled, and we sat down in the grass and started to talk. I remember everything she said, and everything we did, because word for word it was like once before . . . the first time, when we were just kids. It was all the same, Pete . . . everything about it, even the finish . . . that crazy feeling that the ground is falling out from under you, so that you almost ache with the tenderness of it.

"Then I woke up, and Vince was yelling as if he was out of his mind. I crawled out of the bag. I couldn't see for sleep, and he was making so much noise that for a while I couldn't make sense out of anything. But he kept pointing through the ports

where he had the outside lights on. I looked out and saw them.

"Hundreds of them, Pete . . . thousands, in heaps . . . all dead. For hundreds of feet, as far as the lights went, just thousands of them all dead.

"It was real hard for me to get straightened out. It's sort of funny . . . for a long time I had the feeling that I was never going to understand it. A part of the dream, I mean. I told Vince about it later in free orbit on the way back, when we didn't have anything else to talk about. I guess it got him confused, too, because he started to cry again. Now that was just plain stupid, Pete, 'cause Vince never blubbered about anything in his whole life. But he kept patting me on the back and telling me not to say any more about it.

"I don't know why it worried him so . . . but in the dream, Pete, when Linda came running across the field, she was . . . naked. I didn't think much about it at first . . . it seemed all right . . . but when she was in my arms right at the end . . . right when I killed them all . . . she was suddenly covered with fur again, just like always."

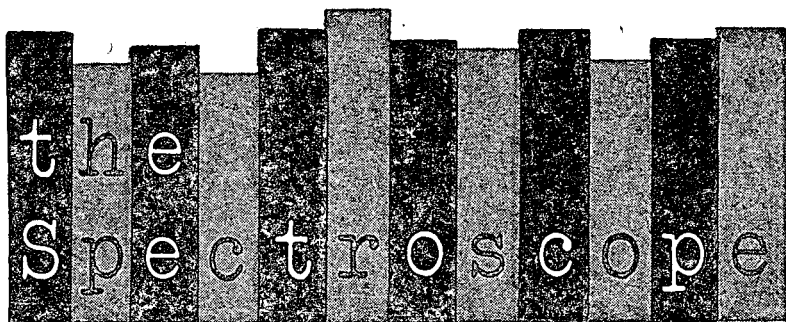
Chuck Norstad paused and then laughed gently.

"Gee, Pete," he said, "Linda sure would look funny as hell without fur, wouldn't she?"

THE END

THEY LIKE US

73



# the Spectroscope

by S. E. COTTS

THE FOURTH "R". By George O. Smith. 160 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.

Jimmy Holden might have been a normal boy except that his parents had built him a machine that could teach him faster and more thoroughly than any human method yet devised. But such a machine was bound to arouse jealousies; some people were even willing to murder in order to control it.

With this as his background, Mr. Smith has written an engrossing novel. In the past he has disappointed the reader sometimes, because of his rather flat style of writing, but he has more than redeemed himself here. The words convey a sense of immediacy that forces us to believe.

The book falls quite naturally into several sections—a brief glimpse of Jimmy before the murder; his dawning consciousness of the menace that threatens him; his many efforts to run away and re-establish himself until he is grown. In spite of these phases, the book hangs together well and the suspense is considerable.

Only the ending is weak and curiously unconvincing. Too much is tied up in too short a space. For this reader's money, Jimmy is right in questioning the way in which this machine is made public knowledge, which is just the opposite to what the author wants us to believe—namely that Jimmy's machine taught him everything except reason.

NO TIME LIKE TOMORROW. By Brian Aldiss. 160 pp. Signet Books. Paper: 35¢.

A short time ago, this column had the pleasure of introducing S-F readers to the English writer, Brian Aldiss, via his first novel, *Starship*. Now here is the American publication of his first book of short stories.

The ones included are mixed in quality. Some are as fine as any you will have a chance to read today, especially "Poor Little Warrior!" and "Judas Danced." In them, a superior descriptive power is put in the service of a daring imagination. Yet all this excitement is held firmly in check by a highly developed technical skill.

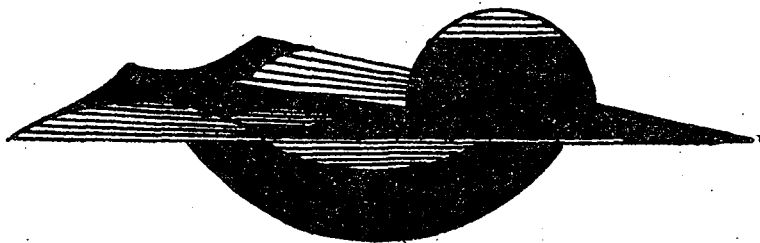
In the less successful ones, Mr. Aldiss has let his imagination overrun all other considerations; the results are vague formless stories with little or no motive and not enough of a mood to excuse the lack of these other features. But even the ones that miss wear a mark of great potential. Mr. Aldiss is one of the really exciting new talents in the bright world of science fiction.

**BOMBOS IN ORBIT.** *By Jeff Sutton. 192 pp. Ace Books. Paper 35¢.*

Looking for some wild adventure stories to liven up those lazy summer days? Here is one that you won't be able to put down until the last crackling page. Even though the rational part of your mind may tell you that the hero will survive his harrowing ordeals, the tautness of the writing generates a tremendous amount of suspense.

The hero, Chris Burke, has the unenviable task of putting the first man-carrying satellite into orbit, not just for the advancement of science, but to disarm three hydrogen bombs that the enemy has launched to hover over the globe.

This is Mr. Sutton's second novel. All the authentic details about equipment and launching procedures that marked his other book are present again, and this time, they are integrated much more successfully into the story. However, the author is so concerned with manipulating the destiny of the hero that he never satisfactorily resolves the crisis between the two countries. In the future he should keep in mind that though his heroes' adventures may take place in a vacuum, his description of them should not.



COMPLETE  
BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

# SOUND OF THE SCYTHER

By  
HARLAN  
ELLISON

ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

## CHAPTER 1

HIS relatively new face was clammy with sweat. Somewhere in front of him Lederman was crouching, a ripper poised, waiting to shoot him down. He made a feeble movement with his gloved hand, toward the sweat of his face, and realized before the motion was completed that he was still bubbled.

He sank back behind the rock, rubbing his shoulders against the ebony basalt, getting faint relief through the space suit for the rivers of perspiration that raced to the small of his back.

Emory bent his head inside the bubble helmet to the sip-tip pro-



At the sight of the rock-





crawdad, Lt. Col. Fileon shrunk away in horror.

truding from the inner circle of his sealing collar, and sucked deeply. It was warm now, but good. After thirteen hours of sparring with Lederman, any sort of relief was welcome.

He tipped his ear against the transparent plasteel of the bubble helmet, laying the bubble against the enormous rock. He held his breath, struggling to catch some sound of movement, conducted through the stone. No sound came through. Lederman was silent, waiting, wherever he was.

A panther in the night . . .

A sudden, inexplicable terror rose in him, and he sprang away from the huge boulder, throwing himself onto his back, the lektro-knife blade upward to thrust; he stared up into the black, airless sky of the asteroid. The crest of the boulder was framed against the sullen stars, but no dark shape of a man crouched there. All remained motionless.

He was starting to crack, and he knew it. Thirteen hours . . . hell, thirteen *years* and two more . . . had taken their toll. His flesh was wet, his mind a turmoil. And worst of all, he was afraid.

It had taken Emory far too long to realize he was a coward, for it to appeal to him. It had been slow in coming, as it is always slow in coming to men who live in self-styled worlds of bravado and delusion; often he had told himself he would react in the heroic fashion to the

proper stimuli, the excitement of the moment.

But time after time, when the chips had been laid out, he had found himself balking, fearing, and most disgraceful of all—running. He no longer had any illusions about himself. It had been long in coming, but now he knew: he was a coward and there was no other way for him to die.

But here, on this asteroid named Brutus, he would die in his own way, in his own time, taking Lederman with him. For Lederman had been the only thing that had kept him going these fifteen years and thirteen hours—the hate of Lederman. The all-consuming, ripe, building fire of loathing that had motivated him across a galaxy, and here to this isolated, wasted rock in space.

The thing that had changed his life twice, his face once, and his soul eternally.

The air regulator on his chest console clucked inside the bubble, and he glanced down apprehensively. Yes, that followed. The air was getting stale. He would not run out.

A vagary of light from the stars caught the bubble, casting back his reflection.

Casting it back for him to shudder at, in his solitude and waitingness.

He had never been good to look on. His face was too wide, and his skin too dark. His hair was almost blue-black, and it ran down the back of his neck, in his



side-burns, over his forehead, in an uncontrolled, wild mass. As though they were two small, bright animals peering from a thicket, his great dark eyes—flecked with some unnameable color—looked out from under the thick mat of hair.

He saw, in that instant of star reflection, the hard lines that came down from either side of his nose, to the corners of his mouth. Scowl lines, beaten into the flesh by years of drawing down the full lips. He scowled at himself, and as though it was a signal, the reflection disappeared.

He laid his head against the great black rock. It was such an empty place to duel, this Brutus, swimming unconcernedly in the night sky. Such a dead place to live, to die, to do anything.

How like his life this rock in space had turned out to be. How pointless, and wonderless, and hopeless, with its towering basalt mountains, its deceptive craters and sinkholes, its featureless plains.

Brutus lay in the palm of space like a lump of coal on a muddy track. Empty. Dead. Like him.

The scrape of something over rock came to him through the boulder and his bubble.

He flattened himself against the boulder, rising by the strength of his knee and calf muscles. He came into a half-crouch, face twisted in strain, hand tight about his lektroknife.

In the next instant a shape rose over the hump of the boulder, and Emory sprang upward violently, a scream tearing from between his lips.

With negligible gravity on the asteroid, his spring carried him up and up and up, driven with terrific momentum, till his body cleared the rock's spine, and his arm shot up, ripping at the flesh of the shape moving toward him.

The lektroknife blurred with its glow in movement, and its aura deepened as he poured power to it from the handle. The weapon entered the body, slick as grease, and was withdrawn as quickly, having spread its billion tendril-killers in the split instant of contact.

He felt himself falling, and he landed at the foot of the rock, his knees bent, as the body crashed down before him.

Only then did he realize the dark shape was not Lederman, but the body of a rock-crawdad, one of the peculiar insect-like creatures that inhabited Brutus.

He stared at the creature, and knew—he was getting too nervous to hold out much longer.

Somewhere out there, armed with a ripper, was Lederman. Waiting for the chance to skulk in here and saw off the top of Emory's head with the ripbeam.

Perhaps this had been the slip.

Perhaps Lederman had found the rock-crawdad and sent it over the rock to belie Emory's position.

As if in answer to the mute wondering, a thick, golden beam

of energy sizzled silently out of the darkness, and spat itself against the boulder over Emory's head.

The rock sheared away, leaving a bright smear, and Emory took a forward somersault, tumbling frantically away from the boulder that was now a death-trap. He scrabbled away in the eternal darkness, and after a long time found a shallow depression beneath another huge boulder, into which he sank.

Now was not yet the time. He had to wait it out.

Lederman was more potently armed. But the time would come; the odds had to change. They *had* to. Fifteen years he had waited; he was not going to be cheated of his prize now.

He settled more comfortably into the depression, turned his air a trifle lower, conserving it, and waited.

Time passed, and memory thoughts climbed in swirling patterns.

## CHAPTER 2

**A**T FIRST it was friendship. Loneliness breeds attraction—Cal Emory was a lonely young man. The Institute for Spatio-Geology was a big school, almost as big as Rutgers School of Speleospatics; but he had been unable to gain admission to Rutgers, chiefly because he was unable to raise the exorbitant fees.

On the other hand, R. P. Lederman had more money than he

had ways of dispensing it, yet his son was deprived the Rutgers admission, also. The reason was greatly different from the one that had kept Emory out; it was a matter of reputation, and a scandal in New Washington involving rare floss-gems from Io and the drive-tube liners for government vessels. R. P. Lederman, Sr. had been featured on the cover of *Time* week and the article about him had not been laudatory.

And so, because both were from New Washington, and because both were young and not "in it," Lederman, Jr., and Emory became friends.

They arranged their schedules at ISG to coincide; they double-dated; they visited each other during the vacations, and grew to like one another.

Then, as so often happens, there was a girl. Her name was Dorothy, and she was that peculiar blend of good looks and sharp wits that could attract two such different young men.

Emory met her, and spent a great deal of time with her. But he was unable to hold the line against Paul Lederman's continental ways, and all-too-sincere show of wealth; for Lederman knew ostentation was the surest way of losing such a girl. So he plied her in a way that made his money and position seem unimportant to him. She responded gratifyingly, and they were married in Lederman's junior year at the Institute.

It was, of course, the shearing

of Emory's friendship with the other. But though it planted the seeds of hatred, they were not to spring into full blossom for some time, despite Emory's backing-down where Dorothy had been concerned. That had been the first concrete evidence Emory had had, that his will was not strong. He had allowed himself to be pushed out of the picture, rather than assert himself aggressively.

Lederman never lorded it over him; that would have been out of character, not at all the thing a man with class would do. But there were frequent invitations to dinner at Lederman's newly-decorated off-campus apartment, and Dorothy looked too radiant for the bitter memory ever to fade.

In their senior year, there was a scandal in the class. Sample cases for the final exam had been switched. Cal Emory was accused of having caused the substitution, for the case he submitted was notched as belonging to one of the previous classes, the property of a high-ranking student from the year before.

He was expelled, and with his expulsion came a friendly offer from Paul Lederman to work for Lederman Intergalactic, as a geological consultant. The pay was not great, but it was a job, and Emory took it without too much thought of the consequences. Yet thoughts of how his own sample case had been switched *did* plague him; though he never reached a satisfactory

conclusion. It was a black mark, and one he could not erase. And the dislike grew slowly.

It grew in intensity, to the point of taking on full form and identification, when Lederman graduated, and moved into second slot in the Lederman Intergalactic organization. Then Emory's job grew distasteful; he found himself being sent out on Skulkships to route the ore diggers from worthy asteroid to rich planet. He was kept off-Earth more than landside.

But it was a steady job, and the pay had grown, so he swallowed the bitter phlegm of Lederman's actions, and reconciled himself to saving his money till the day he could break away and form his own outfit.

Then, nine years after the first day he had met Paul Lederman—now R. P. Lederman, Jr. and sole head of Lederman Intergalactic with the heart attack death of his father—Dorothy died.

Not cleanly, but in an institution, prey to weird gray delusions, and mouthing imprecations against her husband and his tarts, the agony of her life with him, and the horror of the way their baby had died.

For Paul Lederman had not wanted children; the baby had been handled in the incubator rooms. She had never seen it, indeed would not have known it was murdered, had not an acquaintance been Nurse-On-Duty at the time, and confided the truth later.

It was a marriage of five years. Five years that had altered Dorothy so greatly, that despite the magics of the embalmers and the plasteks, Emory was hard-pressed to recognize in that carcass the gems of beauty and wit he had loved when first they had met.

Ironically, he was landside when it happened. Had it been two weeks either way, he would have been blasting, and would have missed the funeral.

Emory did not miss the funeral, but Paul Lederman did. The ceremony was a simple affair, paid for out of Lederman Inter-galactic's petty cash fund. Professional mourners were on hand. At that moment, consumed with grief and hatred, Cal Emory made his promise to the dead. Now there was only to fulfill that promise, and his life had been fulfilled.

It took nerve, and he had no nerve then, so he went to get some.

The place was called BUDWEISER'S NEW WASHINGTON.

He slid into one of the sound-proofed cubicles and dialed in for a drink.

He kneaded his forehead, and allowed the soothing colors and sparkles of the walls to lull his thoughts. Not to deaden them, for what he wanted now was fire, not ashes. But he allowed himself to drowse into a calm kill, with nerves tight and mind set.

After the third drink, he felt he was almost ready. He dialed one more, a double this time.

When the flames had begun to crackle crimsonly in his head, he got up to leave. He had to get a weapon. No . . . it would be more appropriate to do it by hand. He left the bar.

Outside, Emory stopped at the edge of the slidewalk. He did not want the fury to abate. Sliding would take too long, allow the liquor and hatred in him to cool. He put the small fingers of each hand in the corners of his mouth and let out a piercing whistle,

A flit skimmed down from the maelstrom of traffic above and settled an inch above the slidewalk before him.

He slipped in and the flitman gum-chewed over his shoulder, "Where to, Jack?"

"The Lederman Building. Fiftieth floor."

The flit took off, straight up.

As the miles whipped by below, Emory allowed the hatred to boil up in clear, undiluted form. This was the second time his life had been changed; he had not realized it the first time his life had been altered by that hatred—for then the loathing of Lederman had been subliminal. That had been the occasion of his being forced out of college and into servitude to the wealthy young Lederman. As if he had suddenly realized what a dolt he had been, he knew who had been responsible for his expulsion. But why? What twisted factor in Paul Lederman's makeup had impelled him to do such a thing? Whatever it was, it had also killed

Dorothy, and Emory realized fully, for the first time in his life, how lonely he had been—by his own desire—and how he had come closer to being not lonely with Dorothy than he ever had.

Lederman had taken that from him. Had taken Dorothy and what might have been, had taken his career, and now had taken his incentive to go on living to produce. All that remained was desire. A desire to have revenge.

His life had been changed once, subliminally. But this . . . this was the second time . . . the time that counted.

Lederman had moulded him somewhat; he had shoved him onto the Skulkships, and tried to keep him there. Now Emory knew he would never have gotten off them, till the day they carried him Earthside and into the hole.

But all that was ended now, and there was something to replace it.

Hate!

"We're here," the flitman said.

The flit dropped down suddenly and then hit the landing pad.

Emory was there now, with company: the hate.

### CHAPTER 3

THE ante-room of Lederman Intergalactic had walls of a dark blue hue, with gold molding across the ceiling and in heavy rectangular sections at the center of each wall. Modern-framed paintings by Klee, Miro, Kandin-

sky and other Classicists hung low above the backs of two sofas, constructed not for comfort, but for keeping the sitters thereon attentive.

Ash incinerators stood close at hand by the sofas and the three uncomfortable Algerian Modern chairs.

A vid-plate of some thirty inches opaque, was set into one wall, and as Emory had passed through the entrance iris, the plate had smeared itself with color, quickly jelling into the impassive face of an Inner Secretary.

"Yes?" she inquired, an imperious tone in her controlled, slightly husky voice. Her face was oval, set off to advantage by her dark hair, pulled to one side and fastened above the right ear with a casmyte clasp that had rhinestone rivets as decorations. Her eyes were as dark as her hair, and she used them well.

"I want to see Paul Lederman."

"You have an appointment, sir?" The mere thought of his having an appointment was made ludicrous by her tone.

"No."

"Then I'm sorry, sir, Mr. Lederman is—"

"Tell him Cal Emory is here."

"I'm sorry, sir, I can't—"

"Tell him!" The forcefulness of his demand had startled Emory as it had startled the Inner Secretary, for her dark eyes widened momentarily, and a line of annoyance creased between her brows.

The picture squished and was gone. The plate was dead.

Emory walked around the room twice, kicking absently at the legs of the Algerian Modern chairs. He silently commanded Lederman not to refuse him an interview. He *had* to see him, now, before the fury died in him.

His hands ached.

He turned to the wall, and stared at the *Three Musicians* of Picasso. He had always liked that painting; it was a pity Lederman had it in his office. He consoled himself with the knowledge that an interior decorator had put it there, that indeed, Lederman had probably never even noticed the work of a man long since dead.

A voice behind him advised, "You may go in now."

The iris he had not known was there, in the wall opposite, swirled open, and he stepped through, into a corridor of plas-teel walls, subdued in lighting, painted in a way that could not hope to conceal the granite-like material of which the walls were made. Lederman wanted it known he was protected, by wealth, by position, by power and by plasteel.

The corridor took a sharp right turn, a sharp left, a series of dips, rises and angle turns, and he looked behind himself, just in time to see the walls slide into new positions; a minotaur's maze, guaranteed to confuse anyone who wanted out when Lederman did not wish him out.

He shrugged. After it was

over, they'd come to get him anyhow. He wasn't going to run. All he wanted was that moment, and then he was done. He had taken the turn and there was no returning.

Abruptly, the corridor ended, and he found himself at a featureless, blank, unpainted plas-teel wall.

The wall slid into a niche, smoothly, silently, and he was a foot from the threshold to Lederman's inner office.

He had never had occasion to appear here before; if he had seen Lederman in the past, it had been over the vid. Now he was in the presence, and it disturbed him: would a man take such elaborate pains to protect himself, and then admit just anyone?

But then, Emory decided, he wasn't just *anyone*.

His eyes adjusted from the soft light of the corridor into the glaring brightness of the office. The floor was covered with a pile twist rug of crimson, that meshed with the charcoal of the walls in a way that was not flashy in the slightest. The lighting fixtures were hidden in molding around the walls and at the baseboards. One wall was apparently a swingaround, for it was half open, and on its inward-turning face Emory saw a bar, a huge bookshelf and a monorail ladder to reach the upper shelves, a pneumorest chair with massage attachment, a filing cabinet floor model, with

vocoder pipe attached, and a Chef, its robot dials glowing in the dimness of the alcove.

The rest of the room was bare. Not a painting, nor a chair, nor an ash incinerator, nor anything else, save Lederman's desk. And behind that desk, staring coolly at the man who had just entered, was Paul Lederman.

He had changed. It was startling, he had changed so subtly, yet completely. When last Emory had seen him, Paul Lederman had been the hail-fellow-well-met. He had had the eye-twinkle and ready-honest grin of the eternal sophomore. But that had been when Lederman Sr. had been alive, and Paul had been heir apparent. Now he ruled the vast Lederman Intergalactic empire, and he no longer needed the carefully contrived mementos of friendliness and sincerity. Now he was Lederman of Lederman Intergalactic, and there was a thumb to be ground down for those people who needed the boyish grin and hearty back-slap.

His face was long, and the cheek hollows dark with a patina of stubble he would never be able to depilate completely.

As though to complement the two dark areas of his cheeks, his eyes were set deep and black under heavy brows, giving him the look of a Man. Not a man, but a *Man* . . . a man's man, who could never be mistaken for anything else.

His hair had thinned down across the temples and now he wore it slicked straight back, no

nonsense. The wave was gone. His mouth was different, too. It had held ready words of pleasure, and smiles. Now, this mouth, the one he now wore, could hold nothing but commands and iron ingots, and foods that had not been fried. It was a cruel mouth.

Lederman had changed, and though he did not know it, his altered appearance had made it easier for Emory to do what he had to do.

"Hello, Cal. It's been some time. How are you?"

Emory advanced three steps. "That's far enough, Cal," Lederman stopped him by tone and a movement toward the ripper on the desk, close to his fingertips. "Now. How are you?"

Emory did not hear him. "I just came from Dorothy," Emory said, levelly.

Lederman's face changed shadow, as though a new idea of Emory's appearance here, had come to him. He sat back in his solid chair.

"Oh? And?"

"And she didn't look good."

Lederman pursed his thin lips, nodded to no one but himself. "I see. How, uh, how are you, Cal? I hear you've found some excellent cobalt veins out on . . . what was the name of that little planet . . . ?"

"She looked terrible, Lederman. She looked—"

"— yes, I believe the survey called it Trigga. I always liked



names that didn't tax the tongue. Those glottal—"

"She looked *dead*, Lederman! She looked like you'd killed her!"

"You're shouting, Cal."

"Why you lousy . . . !"

"I said that was far enough, Cal . . . now step back there."

The ripper was up, and pointed directly at Emory's face. Cal Emory felt a chill spin down through his body, and he stopped. He *wanted* to move, he *wanted* to go forward, to put his hands around Lederman's neck and press the thumbs in. He *wanted* to do it, but he stopped at the sight of the weapon.

The recognized realization that he was a coward, that he had no courage, no drive when he needed it, cracked through his hatred again. He stood naked before it, knowing it was so, and knowing it would never change. His breath caught, sob-like, in his throat.

"That's better. You always *were*—"

He let the sentence trail off. Emory had not needed him to complete it, having passed over it in detail a thousand times before.

"Now. What can I do for you, Emory?" The first name stage was gone. Even politeness distressed Lederman now.

"I—I—why did you do it to her?" Emory found himself pleading for a reason, for some logic, for some answer.

"No great loss," Lederman tossed off. He laid the ripper down, hard by his hand.

Emory could not believe he had heard correctly. "No . . . *no great loss*? Are you, what are you, then why did you *marry* her? You could have had her, why did you have to *marry* her . . . if you did not . . . why!"

"Because she wore blue, Emory. That's why."

Silence. While Emory's mind threatened to snap. To accept in his own mind that he would rather have had her soiled, than not at all. To admit to himself he would not have cared if another man had made love to her, just so he might have her later, these were hard enough to reconcile. But instead of a logical reason, instead of a sane and rational answer to that hardest question, he received . . . what?

"I—I don't under—"

"She wore blue, Emory. You remember that. She used to wear it all the time. I was always queer for blue, for women in blue."

"And that . . . that was why you married her?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"What are you talking about, you pig! What are you saying? Are you telling me—*me*?—that you married Dorothy because she wore blue, for no other reason? Is that what you want me to believe, you stinking—"

Lederman's voice cut through with softness as calm as a quicksand bog: "It doesn't matter what you think. It never did. I've done what I've done because I had the right to do it."

"Right? What right?"

"My right!"

Emory wanted to charge forward, to throw himself on Lederman. "*Your* right! Who the hell do you think you are . . . God?"

Lederman's laugh was short, harsh, and ugly.

"You're insane," Emory said, fuming.

Lederman spun in the chair, and his feet hit the rug with a muffled whump. "Don't be melodramatic. I'm as sane as you, Emory. Though right now that's no recommendation."

"What kind of man are you?" Loathing and disgust rang.

Lederman put his palms flat on the desk top, and leaned across at Emory, still halfway across the room. Emory had not moved since he had received the command not to do so. "What kind of a man am I? I'll tell you, ex-roommate, because you never knew, and you'll never *know*!"

"I'm the kind of man who can do anything. I can do anything because I have no compunctions about who I smash, or what I smash. *I* count, Emory. *I* count above all else. It's a world that wants to bite you, and if you let them, they'll eat you alive.

"I eat, too, Emory. I eat better and faster, and swallow a lot more smoothly than any of them. Because I know what counts. Me!"

The word hit Emory like a pile-driver: amoral.

Lederman had no morals, no feelings, no humanity in him

that a normal man could identify with. Lederman was something alien, something unhuman. Amorality was his cloak, his shield, his sword and his escutcheon. And it was so black, nothing, absolutely nothing, could soil it.

"You never understood that, did you, Emory?"

"You never knew that I married her because you wanted her, and because she was wanted, I wanted her. I had her because if I had not, it would have meant I had failed. I don't fail, Emory. That's why I'm here, and you . . . you're there!"

"You've probably guessed by now. I was the one who engineered your expulsion from college, and for an equally good reason. I wanted you near me, to work for me, so you could see me, see how I did things, and so it would eat you the way I wanted it to.

"I wanted you as a reminder of what I'd be if I ever let myself get soft and weak and sniveling like you. You've done wonders for me, boy. Just wonders. I look at you in the survey records and I say, 'That's Cal Emory. He just ain't got it.' And then I look at myself and I say, 'Keep eating, Paul. Just keep eating.'"

Emory could contain himself no longer. It was as though Lederman had gathered unto himself all the filth and madness of the universe, and was pouring it, gallon by gallon, into Emory's bloodstream.

Cal Emory had leaped, then. He had jumped forward, and watched—as though through a

mist—as Lederman remained stock still behind the desk. He had thought the man would go for the ripper at once, but Lederman did not move. Cal plunged madly forward, his hands hooked and outstretched to rip out Lederman's tongue—

—until he cracked face first into the force screen!

He went crashing forward, his entire body coming against it with such force he thought he had broken his nose, smashed his rib cage. He felt the pain course through him, and then he was lying on his back, and the ceiling was pumping up and down like an oil derrick on some small asteroid. He felt his face with a stranger's hand, and it was as though he had died and was resurrected.

"You mite!" Lederman was chortling softly. "Did you think for an instant I'd allow a scum like you to come in here without myself being protected? You've been followed all day. I knew where you went. I knew you'd been to see her. Why do you think I let you in here?"

"To gloat over your ignorance, little man. To tell you what a useless, cowardly little bug you really are! Now get out of here. Get out and thank God I don't fire you, and have you blackballed.

"I want you around for a while yet, Emory. I want you around, knowing that I can cut off your life and your job and anything else I desire, at any time. Now get out of here and stop bothering me!"

He bent, spoke into the hush alcove, and a second later a burly man in a too-tight raglan chiton came out of another doorway, on Emory's side of the force barrier. The man lifted Emory by the scruff of the neck, and half-carried him—pain and all—out of the office, and onto the roof pad. The burly man pitched Emory from him, sending the smaller man skidding onto his side on the plasteel pad.

"Mr. Lederman don't like wise guys," he chimed, thinking himself voluble and clever. "Go 'way an' don't come back!"

Then he was gone, and Emory lay with his raw, aching cheek plastered to the night-cool plasteel.

It was out in the open now.

It would not be simple. Lederman would not be taken easily. But that didn't matter. He had time. All his lifetime to do it. One day he would be alone with Paul Lederman, and the other man would have no force barrier to protect him.

The memories ebbed for a moment. Brutus was still silent and cold. Emory lay back against the rock, and slid his finger along the closed length of the lektroknife. It would be soon now.

He was crying, and there were many reasons for it.

## CHAPTER 4

HE BIDED his time, on the Skulkships, in and out around the galaxy, watching, waiting, hoping for an edge.

He found himself changing quickly. Where before he would pursue his surveys with calm and solid deliberation, now he came to the many intricate problems of skulking with ferocity, and impatience. There was a worm eating at his innards, and it would not be satisfied till it had finished its meal.

He kept searching, working, thinking, trying to devise a plan. For he knew now that Lederman would not be taken easily. Lederman had the money and the power of Lederman Intergalactic behind him, and there would be other force barriers, other mazes, other guards, that would keep Emory from killing him.

He found himself solely and single-purposedly driven in his thoughts, his actions, even his dreams, to the fruition of that desire.

But the months dragged past, and he heard no more from Lederman. He was kept on in the Skulships, and he knew it was only at the sufferance of his enemy. Lederman could easily have thrown Emory out, had him blacklisted, deprived him of even the right to earn a living, but the magnate had explained it all to Emory. He was much more valuable as a symbol, and as a bit of humanity to torment, when Lederman had nothing better to do. Totally, unashamed amoral, he was. And Cal Emory sweated under that emotional yoke without remark or act of revolt, for he knew his time would come, when he found that edge.

Then, almost a year later, he found it one trip.

He was playing the board at the Huey Long Casino on Davis, one of the three hundred habitable planets in the Crucae Minoris cluster; the star system had been settled some four hundred years before by an incorporation of planters, merchants, manufacturers and politicians from the American South. They had settled it in their own way, and they had brought their own kind of law to the cluster.

The planets were named Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee Alpha and Beta, Dixie, and a host of others sectionally emotional appellations, calculated to engender and sustain the type of devotion the founders had desired. There were no blacks in the cluster; there were no foreign-borns; there were no aliens; there were no Catholics and no Jews.

The official religion of the cluster was Southern Baptist. The official color was white. The official nationality was Southern American. Removed from the land of origin, the roots extended invisibly through space back to Earth.

There were many things about the cluster Emory did not like, but gambling was not one of them. He had made a five-hit bounce from Earth to P. Centauri, to Udaluu, to Barsoom, to Point Pleasant, and now down on Davis. With many catalogued skulk stops in between, to raise

ore deposits, he had grown weary, and decided to call halt on Davis for a week of relaxation, gambling and—what had descended on him recently—extensive drinking bouts.

He was playing the board at the Huey Long, his stack of plasts dwindling rapidly as the colored lights flashed out combinations that were not the ones he had dialed.

He felt someone at his back, but did not turn around. His wallet slit was sealed and the inevitable pickpurses of the casinos could not rob him. He hated kibitzers.

As if in defiance of the unseen person behind him, he slipped a dozen plasts into the slot and began to dial 6-6-6-6-6. A voice behind him suggested, "Try 9-0-9-5-1."

He turned, his finger in the dial hole, and found himself staring at a quatroon. The man's hair was as white as his flesh, and that was a dead-paste white. His eyes were startlingly black in the framework of his ivory skin, and his lips were so slight a pink that they might have been almost milky. His white hair was swept back in a fashionable pompadour. He wore a gray chiton with a diamond-studded clutch-belt.

"What did you say," asked Emory.

"I said: 9-0-9-5-1 would be a wiser choice."

Emory's brows drew down. "Why should that be?"

"It's going to win," the quatroon replied assuredly.

Emory turned and his back stiffened. He dialed 6-6-6-6-6.

The board lit up. 9-0-9-5-1 came up winner.

Then Emory turned and turned completely. "I'd like to talk to you, Mr. Emory," the quatroon said, almost shyly.

Emory was undecided, whether to be more amazed that the strange white man wanted to talk to him, assuming a stranger on a strange planet *would* talk to him . . . or that the quatroon knew his name. Abruptly, Emory felt no desire to win back the plasts he had lost on the board. He nodded briefly, and the quatroon moved off.

Emory gathered up his few remaining plasts, and jiggling them in his palm, followed the white man across the tiered length of the gambling casino.

The quatroon turned into the men's bar, and took a hushboo far down one line of the silence alcoves.

Emory slid in, across from him.

"I've been waiting to speak to you for some time, Mr. Emory."

"What did you say your name was?"

"I didn't, Mr. Emory."

Emory started to rise. "Then good evening to you."

The quatroon laid a pale white hand with faintly bluish nails on Emory's arm. "Please," he said softly, but with urgency.

Emory sat back down.

"You may call me Albino, if

you need a name," the white man said, and there was no embarrassment in his voice. He noted Emory's startled expression, and added, "I was born this way, Mr. Emory. I've quite grown used to it. Don't let it unnerve you. It doesn't bother me."

Emory cleared his throat. "Nothing unnerves me except people who come out of nowhere, and who call me by name. Who are you?"

"Let's say I'm a catalyst, Mr. Emory." He smiled enigmatically.

"That was quite a spectacle in there," Emory jerked a thumb toward the gaming rooms.

"Oh?"

"Yes: calling the board combo. I found it most unusual. If your talk has anything to do with more of the same, I'm your man." Money would be a part of any plan to seek formation, and Emory was anxious to amass some quickly, in the eventuality of a plan's appearance.

"Really nothing, Mr. Emory. I happen to own this casino. Silent partner. The board is quite crooked, you know."

Emory's mouth hung agape. The Albino chuckled ruefully. "I hope you aren't this easily shocked in *all* matters, sir. That would make our conversation ended at the outset."

Emory snapped his jaws closed. There was a great deal here to learn. The quattron was more than he seemed.

"I'm listening, Mr.—ah—Al-

bino. But you haven't told me how you know my name."

The quattron smiled enigmatically, and drew a cheroot from a lapel holder. He scratched it alight on a convenient jeweled emory-bracelet and puffed twice, deeply, before answering. "I also happen to own this planet, Mr. Emory. I had a scan done on you. I believe I know more about you than any other human being—"

He paused, for effect . . .

Then went on dramatically . . .

"—with perhaps the exception of Paul Lederman."

It was as if someone had dropped an ocelot on the table between them. There was an eternity-long instant of complete silence, and then an explosion of activity. Cal Emory stood up in the hushboo, reached across, and grabbed the tall, ivory man's chiton-front. He jerked the albino to his feet, with a fist cocked, and shouting, "One of L-Lederman's stoolies . . ." his words stuttered with fury, "... can't I g-get away from you bas—" when the quattron brought up one slim-fingered wedge of a hand, and with a flicking motion not only dropped Emory's hand from his clothing, but paralyzed the raging spaceman from shoulder socket to fingertips. Emory shrieked as pain flooded back into the arm, and a fierce throbbing stopped all thoughts of violence.

Albino shoved gently against Emory's chest, and the dark-haired man slipped with a thump back onto his seat.

After a few minutes, Emory groaned like a small animal, and his eyes began to unglaze. His arm felt as though someone had run five hundred yellow-hot stringers in behind his fingernails, all the way to his shoulder.

"Good Lord . . ." he gasped, a small trickle of drool edging from his mouth, ". . . what did you do to me?" He clutched his arm tightly, occasionally closing his eyes with pain.

"An offshoot of Sumo, Mr. Emory. Something I picked up in my travels. I'm really quite sorry. But I must ask you never to touch me again. I'm overly sensitive, I'm afraid. I'm sure you can understand." His politeness now struck Emory as snake slickness.

"What do you know about me?" Emory demanded roughly.

"I know a great deal, sir. A very great deal. But first you are undoubtedly wondering who I am, and why I've mildly ensnared you in conversation. Am I right?" He smiled affectionately.

Emory glared at the ivory man.

"I am a man of considerable wealth and position, Mr. Emory. I own anything of value on Davis, and much of worth throughout this cluster. Yet," and he spread his hands with resignation, "I am an ambitious man. There is a certain degree to which I aspire. In pursuance of this aspiration, Mr. Emory, I have run afoul of many snags and blocks."

Emory listened very carefully. There promised money in this . . . and money was what he needed to get Lederman.

"At the same time, sir, I am a conscientious individual, and I contribute to many charities, support institutions of public welfare, and lend my aid to uncountable service organizations . . ."

The quatroom smiled sweetly. "I am by way of being a humanitarian, sir, and though I resent having my sympathies played upon to the extent of dispensing funds where they will not be appreciated properly, occasionally I hit upon a charity that demands immediate attention, and donations thereto."

"What the hell are you talking about, Mister?"

"How would you like two hundred thousand dollars, gratis, to further your vendetta against Lederman of Lederman Inter-galactic?"

"Good-bye."

"*Sit down!*—I said: *sit down!*" The albino's face was stretched tight as white linen. His eyes glowed hotly.

"Don't be a fool, Emory. I expect payment in kind. In return for this money, I'll want some information from you, from time to time, on various phases of your progress. Is that too much to ask?"

Emory ran a hand through his hair. What was going on here? Of a sudden, he was the center of a frenetic imbroglio whose true meanings he could not even begin



to grasp. This man was no fool, nor was he a charlatan. When he gave, he received. That was the inflexible rule of this sort of man. For Emory had run against them before; Lederman was one in sharp perspective.

"You'll have to explain it to me. I don't understand."

The quatroom smacked the table. There was anger here, as well as gentlemanliness and cunning. "What is there to understand, man? I want you to have some money. I've had a scan done on you, and I see that your crusade is a righteous one. At the same time I may need some recreation. A way to spend my money. Is that so difficult to fathom?"

Emory knew he was lying. Lying so completely, that the truth was a protectively-colored animal, lurking in an underbrush of lies. His arm and hand still throbbed painfully, but the pangs were diminishing slowly. He did not want to antagonize this man . . . not yet . . . not to some good end.

"You don't strike me as that kind of person."

"Oh? No? And how *do* I strike you, Mr. Emory?"

"Sharp."

Albino chuckled, an octave deeper than Emory had thought his soft, tissue voice could go. "Sharp flashy? Or sharp smart?"

Answers were meaningless at this point, but: "A little of each."

"You flatter me, sir."

"I was intending to do just that."

"We've been sparring, Mr. Emory. Do you want the money or not? Merely yes or no will suffice."

Emory pondered a moment. There was no sense letting himself be dragged into something he did not understand; Albino was no patsy; there was something here to be explained. He took a wild stab, and struck to one of the lobes of the heart of the matter:

"Was the Negro blood on your mother's or father's side?" Emory pushed to the limit: "And the eetee blood . . . is that father or mother's side?"

Had it been possible for the white man's face to go chalkier, at that instant it made the change. Emory thought for a moment that he was dead. *This man will kill me for sure*, he thought. *I've ripped at wounds that never healed properly.*

The quatroom's face was an abstract painting of agony and depression and tensely-contained fury. He breathed heavily and his fine, aquiline nose flared with the power of a laboring heart.

Emory knew what he had done.

The term on Earth for a man one-quarter Negroid was "quadroom." When man had hit space, and the inevitable matings with extraterrestrials—eetee by way of defamation—had occurred, the word had undergone a small alteration. A "t" for a "d". At first they had tried "quaetroon"—in-

dicating an eetee-lover in the strictest sense of the word by the "et" added—but it had abbreviated throughout the galaxy.

The man whose background included one Negro and one eetee was a man with a twin burden, never able to lift either, condemned by ridicule and the shibboleths of half-understood heredity. He was a pariah whose blood ran many colors in the eyes of the ignorant. He was a pariah whose home would always be on the verge of having its front lawn decorated with a burning cross. He was the damned.

The Albino was so tense, Emory was certain that had he snapped a finger at the man, he would have sounded, as a tuning-fork. The white man drew a ragged breath, and his coloring returned to its maggoty normal. "That was quite a bit below the belt, Mr. Emory," he said dryly. His eyes were not of the same vocal tone as his words.

"I thought that had something to do with it," Emory answered, ready to spring and run at the slightest movement of violence.

Albino wet his pale lips, and closed his eyes. He leaned his head back against the resilient pneumostuff, and there was a fine patina of sweat clouding his forehead and nose. He began speaking so softly, for some time Emory could not make out the words:

"I've made something of myself, sir. I've done it over odds you would consider insurmount-

able. Not only am I a part-black in a cluster founded by men whose very thinking catalogs Negroes with animals, but there is alien blood in me.

"My great-grandmother, sir, was a Catallain. I have no idea what your morals may be, nor do I care, really, but I'm sure you'll agree there are few more beautiful races in the galaxy than the people of Catall. But that doesn't seem to matter.

"Despite all that, through means even I hesitate to recollect, I have made myself wealthy beyond the ability of others to crush me for my blood. I am above that, and yet, very much part of it. I can be hurt, sir, as you have just seen."

"Lederman?" Emory felt ashamed of himself, speaking the word as politely as he could.

"His father. The elder, the senior, the respected R. Paul Lederman the First. It was a long time ago. Almost too long to bother remembering . . . and yet . . . and yet . . ." he leaned forward, opening those strange eyes, "... and yet I remember it. I remember the people in that reception committee on Earth. I remember the banners, and the catcalls, and the feet, and the fruit. I remember it all."

Emory was amazed. "Lederman was involved with a racial hatred group? I can't believe it? He was too wealthy to bother."

Albino ticked a finger against the tabletop. "Oh, make no mistake. There was no prejudice involved. Lederman was neither

above nor below *that*; in fact, he was unconcerned. But I had holdings in Lederman Intergalactic territory, and he had to discredit me. There was a carefully-laid plan of publicity, news-breaks, propaganda, hate sentiments stirred up, and the final insult, that day I arrived on Earth for the hearings. I lost the holdings, of course. His organization was bigger than mine, and my fight was a weak one. I didn't stand a chance of beating him.

"But I've never forgotten him for it. The holdings didn't matter. I might have lost them in a hundred ways. But the tactics he used, the way in which he reduced me to a savage, standing there on the escalator of that drop-ship, feeling all the racial hatred of those people—none of whom *knew* me!—that was something I could not overlook. I've waited a great while to even the score, Mr. Emory."

"And you think I can do it?"

"I think you have an 'in' with Lederman, a psychological attraction for him, that he can't overlook. I think there's a chance you can do it, and if you can, if I can settle that score, it's worth it to me to invest in you as an enterprise."

"You really hate him, don't you?"

The quatroom shook his head. "No. I see you don't understand, sir. I don't hate him at all. This is no compulsion to destroy, as it is with you. How could I hate the son for what the father has done? I'm not much, according

to some people, but I like to think I'm at least rational.

"The logic is simple. My people have had a great many scores that have needed to be settled, in the name of justice, sir, and this is but one more of them. But this time I know the situation, and I can take a hand in it, make certain the outcome is what justice would demand. No hatred, merely the way it has to be. Now do you—"

Emory cut in. "I understand. I'll accept your money."

The quatroom reached into a seal-flap and brought out a check-book. He began to script in the forgery-proof check, and stopped a moment. "I'd like occasional reports on what your plans may be."

"I'll see that you get them." Fear clawed at Emory. Now he was truly committed. There was no longer any chance to hide from himself. He would have to get Lederman at all costs.

"What is your first move?"

"I don't know. I just don't know. But I'll find it when the time comes."

The check passed hands, and the Albino rose from the table. "It has been stimulating, sir. I trust we will meet again soon."

Emory held the check, realizing his damp fingers were leaving moist little circles at either end. "I'm sure we will. Good-bye."

The very white man disappeared through an alcove, and Emory was alone.

## CHAPTER 5

AND all that year, he sang the silent songs, and trod the dark paths, and lived with the faceless thoughts of which vengeance was made.

Two hundred thousand dollars was a mere bagatelle compared to the incalculable wealth of Lederman Intergalactic. He knew that. But he also knew the legend of the wasp: one small wasp could, by its harassment, send an army into confusion, riot, and eventual destruction. In itself, two hundred thousand dollars could do little. But as a means to the eventual end of Lederman's death, it was a mighty force.

But there had to be planning.

And maneuvering of a depthful breed.

His first maneuver was to lose himself. For under the scrutinizing eye of Paul Lederman—whose interest was one that precluded anything but psychotic attentiveness—he could do nothing without being observed and stopped. So he began his crusade by disappearing. In a manner most involved and peculiar.

So he might change more than just his life. His life that had twice been touched—no, shattered—by Paul Lederman, for no logical reason . . . yet valid reason, in the eyes of an egocentric, amoral man.

Cal set out to find someone who was adept at a lost trade, an outlawed trade, a deadly and particular trade: cellular alteration.

He began his disappearance by

paying a visit to one of the share-holders in Lederman Intergalactic. As a skulker he had found many juicy bits of information concerning new deposits and upcoming interests of the firm. By judiciously ladling these out to several people, he had acquired sources of information on Earth. One of these was Dolly, a woman who led a double life.

When he reached her, she told him that she knew of only one man. A one-eyed man named Patooch who had the skill. The skill to change Cal Emory in body and face. Change him from a man known to Lederman and his organization to another man—a name came to mind—called John Trigg, a speleospatist from somewhere on the galaxy's Rim. A man whose services would be invaluable to Lederman Intergalactic.

Emory was growing impatient. He wanted his face changed soon, so the plan he had formulated for revenge could begin. "How can I find Patooch?" he asked Dolly.

"He ain't been in business lately."

"What do you mean?" annoyance welled up in Emory.

"The authorities caught up with him kind of sudden-like. He's headed out on a Tracker ship right now."

Emory's face crumbled. "Headed out? Headed out where? Tell me, Dolly, I've got to know. Where'd they send him?"

She shook her head. "You don't want him *that* bad, Sonny?"

"How bad? Where's he bound?"

She hesitated. Her eyes held dead seriousness. "Ain't nobody wants *anybody* bad enough to go out *there* to get him."

"Damn it, Dolly, where are they taking him?"

She sighed heavily, then answered: "The Stone."

Cold from the steppes blew through Emory's heart. If it was worth dying for, it was worth working for. He had to have a new face, and the only way to get it properly was to find Patooch. If Patooch was on the Stone, then that was where Cal Emory would have to find him.

A Skulkship bounced out from Sikorsky Spaceport Pad No. 43 that night. Outward bound for the twin tobacco-growing planets of Liggett and Lorillard, circled in a lazy-8 orbit by the empty prison rock known throughout the galaxy as the Stone.

Deep space, and the snooze was in full.

Emory lay out in the gelatin-pad, his body sunk into its impressive warmth only enough to dent-in his configurations. The soft blue fog that washed over the gel pad, inside the clear plas-steel hood of the snooze tank itself, gave a weird and oddly-sick appearance to his skin. With the snooze turned on full, he would not only sleep his way out of the system, and across the Rim to the First Nebula, but his body would undergo a healthful rejuvenation.

When he awakened from the snooze the warning alerts were flashing yellow-in all over the small Skulkship. As he dragged himself off the gel pad the words of the pitman whom he had bribed to get this ship offground, came back to him: *If Lederman ever finds out, I'm dead, Mr. Emory.*

There was no question about that. They would both be dead. If Paul Lederman could know what was happening out here in far space, he would have the entire Lederman Intergalactic fleet. bounced away and searching for Emory. But he thought Cal Emory was still beating his boots off, trying to find another spatio-geologic job, in organizations that already carried the Lederman blackball.

Emory had once done a favor for the pitman, and so he had been able to bribe free this Skulkship. That was the first step, and it had been carefully taken. The pitman would not be able to relay Emory's direction-of-bounce without incriminating himself and suffering Lederman's insane wrath.

He was naked; it was cold; he shivered, hugged himself, and bit his blue lips. His clothes warmed him; he turned the clutch-belt to *warmest*.

He was free of Earth, and all he had to do was get the one-eyed man named Patooch off the Stone. An impossible job he knew he had to do. Because now, in so short a time, the hatred that had built for so many years, had be-

come the one driving force in his life. It was an obsession now, he realized, perhaps an unhealthy one; but it was the only meaning his now-useless life held, and he must pursue it to its end, or die a coward without goal.

To die a coward was not necessarily bad; but to die one without a goal was unthinkable. It meant the years had been wasted, that Dorothy had died without revenge, that Lederman would go on-using his inherited power to indulge that quietly terrible nature of his.

Emory was a man driven. Furiously, unthinkingly, all-consumingly driven.

The warners greened-in and Emory knew the plottank had picked out Asteroid 7290-7557 of the Liggett and Lorillard chain. The great chain that floated between the two worlds, in lieu of honest moons. That asteroid was the prison of the galaxy. The Stone.

The ship dropped swiftly, coursing in like a dolphin in smooth seas, and the warners made it red-in for landing co-ords.

A static voice cut in over the ship's hifi and blasted at Emory:

"Landfall Alpha to Mite Class vessel. Landfall Alpha to Mite Class vessel. You are approaching a restricted area. Please veer off or declare yourself. Please veer off or declare yourself!"

"Landfall Alpha, this is Skulship Bravo Niner Fi-yive One. Request landing co-ordinates

with intention of speaking to your Commandant. Repeat—"

He reeled off the message again, was advised to stand by, and was eventually given the proper code to buzz in. He brought the tiny ship down on the assigned pad, and was not surprised to see a full-pack guard mounted at the foot of the landing escalator.

He descended in the glare of kliegs set about the ship; kliegs that had been electronically ordered up and out of their sockets at his landing.

Far off, across the Dome, he could see the huge pastel block that was the prison of The Stone. The fortress itself, where Pattooch slept now.

The Corporal of the Guard stepped forward snappily, and saluted, bringing his hand flat to his heart and away with a slashing movement that indicated the original meaning of the gesture had been subverted to mean fealty, and death-before-dishonor. Emory nodded sharply; he was frightened.

"Corporal Tangmott requests your following the Guard, sir." His face was all angles, sharp-nosed and sunken cheeks.

"I'd like to see your Commandant," he said aloud.

The Corporal nodded brusquely. "In due course, sir."

Emory fell into step behind the gray-suited figure with his eagle's crest helmet and chest-stripes. In a liquid accompanying movement, the Guard formed around him in a tight box. He

was quickly walked to a waiting monorail. He was waved to a lead seat, and slid into the bucket without having to be ordered. The Guard piled in around him, and almost before the last man had pulled his riprifle in after him, the plasteel bubble of the monorail hushed down, and the car sped away on its silver cord.

The scenery whipped past like so much running paint on a canvas. He felt more disquieted, the nearer they came to the fortress, and he wondered if perhaps his mission wasn't insane. He forced the thought from his mind; this was his life now. He had nothing left to live for. No purpose, no direction but this direction.

He would find Patooch, whatever the price. He had an idea of how he could get what he wanted from the little man. He also had an idea of what it would cost him. His soul, perhaps. But even that was not too much to have to give for the achievement of his goal.

The monorail slid down into a trough, clicked home, and sighed off. The bubble slid back pneumatically, and his Guard climbed free, one by one.

They waited for him to follow.

He joined them, legs unsteady and prickling from having fallen asleep. He stamped his feet to work out the odd sensation, and nodded to the Corporal. He indicated with a flat hand the direction they would take; the surrounding square formed around Emory once more. Then they led him toward the fortress.

A CERTAIN breed of man took assignment on outworlds like The Stone. Men with the inability to cope: there was life and there was pressure and there was drive and emotion, in there, on the Inworlds. For the men who wanted none of these, who found terror in these, there were still positions with the Guard on the Outworlds.

Make no mistake. The Guard itself was a combat outfit; the men who manned the skulks and the scouts were military men, and their lives were lives of adventure and tedium and harassment, as the lives of military men have always been. Theirs was the adventuring; for the settlers there was the pioneering; but for the men who manned the Guard offices of petty bureaucracy, there was a sedentary, sheltered life.

Lt. Colonel Samuel Marshall Fileon was a magnificent study in unadaptability. His life had been one flight after another. There had been days of disorientation in primary schools, days of confusion in college, days of bewilderment in Guard Academy on P. Centauri. It had been chiefly through luck—no one had discovered him—that he had made it without event.

There are men like that. Luck has nothing to do with it. The kindness of a soft-hearted fate, perhaps, but never luck. Luck would never have let these men be born in the first place.



He reached his graduation, had his novae pinned to his shoulder straps, and was assigned, without anyone realizing his terror at the logical structure of the universe around him.

His assignment had been a "first asgt." It was the sort of post used as a gauge of a man's skill, a testing ground, a jumping-off place for the first big events of his military career, not intended for more than two year's stopover.

Lt. Col. Samuel M. Fileon had been at The Stone for twenty-three years when Cal Emory came to speak.

He lived by the book. The regs were constant. There was safety in keeping your nose clean. Do what the regs say you can do, and they won't relieve you of even *this* petty a post. For the years were advancing, and he knew he could not go out to man a light-cruiser now. He was too old, too weary. No, it was do it right, and stay on at The Stone. Screw up—and the trapdoor closes.

The vid box peeped aware, and Colonel Fileon looked up from his supply requisitions. He passed a hand before the box's eye, and the face of the Readyroom Attendant—a dimpled Kalaxian with bad breath—jelled into focus.

"Yes, Guardsman?"

"Corporal of the Guard Tangmott, sir. He has the pilot of that Mite class with him. The man says he wants to speak to you, sir." The dimples flashed in and

out across the Kalaxian's triangular face.

"Wants to speak with *me*?" Ripples began to appear in the calm sea of Colonel Fileon's existence. "About what?"

"He refuses to say, sir."

Fileon saw a way out. It was covered in the regs by a section on protocol: "Send him on his way. Have him come through proper channels."

There was the sound of a brief scuffle from off-vid, and then another face supplanted the Kalaxian's. "My name is Emory, Colonel. I'm with LedGalac. I've come a long way to see you, and I don't think our lobbies in the G. C. would like to hear that one of their representatives had been badly treated."

Mention of the Galactic Congress, and the thought of a congressional investigation brought Fileon to his feet. "Send him in, Guardsman."

The vid box picture faded out and a moment later the heavily-braced door to the Colonel's office opened inward. Cal Emory, a tall, intensely-dark man, stood in the doorway, rubbing his left bicep. "Your boys play rough, Colonel."

He stepped inside, and the door slammed shut. The Colonel winced at the sound; repairs on The Stone had to be requisitioned like everything else, and this was one of the last outposts in order of priority. Many things were in a state of disrepair, and it would not look good, were this an investigator from some world of

note. He wished the door had not slammed.

*And what did LedGalac want now? Hadn't he done as he had been instructed? How low did they expect him to sink? How far did they think a man could be pushed?*

"Terribly sorry, Mr.—I'm afraid I didn't quite catch the name—?"

"Emory."

"Oh, yes. Mr. Emory. Terribly sorry. But we *are* a maximum security prison, you know. And we have to be particularly careful. I'm sure you understand; almost any sort of disturbance could upset the balance on our deepsleep troughs. They're very delic—"

He had waited for a nod, a smile, an acknowledging agreement, but it did not come. The ripples on the sea grew wider, deeper.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Emory?"

Emory moved across the bare floor, taking note of the Spartan emptiness of the office, to the unresisting shape of an old-style chair. He slid into it, and watched the Colonel as he settled himself into his own chair behind the desk.

*He's the nervous type*, Emory thought, with growing hope for his bluff. Fileon's hair was gray at the temples, and rumpled, as though his hands were forever wandering through it. But the hair was not silvery, not distinguished; it was a dirty gray. Tired hair, for a tired face. His

eyes could not lock with Emory's, but slid away as quickly as they made contact. Fileon's eyes, too, were gray; as gray as his hair, and they gave his face a washed-out, exhausted look. His mouth was weak, with a pudgy baby-fat lower lip; his hands were constantly plucking at the pink lips.

"Now," the Colonel tried joviality, "what can I do for you, Mr. Emory?"

Emory stared intently at Fileon. There was no question . . . the man was frightened. But, of what? Did this strengthen Emory's suspicions? He decided to eliminate the fencing and the veiled threats, and to strike directly to the point. "I want one of your prisoners."

It was the first time Emory had ever seen a man turn white.

The ripples grew to waves, and Lt. Col. Samuel Marshall Fileon felt his craft buffeted. "You, you *what?*" his tone indicated he had not heard correctly. He added, however, as a vitally safe afterthought, "Sir?"

"You have a man here named Patooch. He came in just recently. I want him." Emory tried forcefulness, just short of bluster.

Fileon plucked at his lips, then licked them. "But you can't possibly have one of our prisoners, Mr. Emory. You know, I mean, you certainly understand that a man sentenced here must serve out his, I mean, a man who comes here to sleep is incarcerated for a period not to exceed—"

He was quoting the regs.

Emory waved away his objections carelessly. "I want to know what the sentence is on Patooch, and under what governing authority."

"Why under the Guard authority . . ."

"I want to see it, Colonel, and I don't like waiting."

"You can't just demand . . ."

"I can, and I do, as a free citizen, Colonel. And more than that, I demand through my connection with LedGalac. The C. G. would be very inter—"

"Now no one is *denying* you that privilege, Mr. Emory, it's just that—"

Fileon tried to stare down the dark-eyed man with the unruly hair, but something burned in Emory's eyes. Something that brought to mind images of green babies and unclean habits. The Colonel buzzed for the Ready-room Attendant. They sat there in taut silence, waiting, and a moment later the Kalaxian stepped into the office. "Yes, Colonel?"

"Do we have a file on Patooch?"

"I'll check on it, Colonel," and the Kalaxian was gone.

Fileon seemed to realize, then, that he was still the master of The Stone, and that he was being compromised. He coughed with mock embarrassment and leaned forward across the desk, plucking at his full lower lip. "You don't seem to recognize my position, Mr. Emory. I have a

great many responsibilities as Commandant."

Emory was bored. He wanted one thing, and one thing only. But if he had to endure this man's pompous military gabble, then he would. For a while. It was obvious the Colonel was frightened of something; perhaps the threat of Congressional inquiry, perhaps it was something else . . .

And that might be a powerful weapon to pry Patooch loose from The Stone.

"Only hardened criminals are sent here to sleep, Mr. Emory. For decent folks who want to offer themselves in the deepsleep, they've got the Centers. So you realize, of course, that I can't do anything decisive that might be contrary to established Guard policy, without release from my superiors. What is your authority?"

"Before I say anything more, Colonel, I'd like to see what charges have been brought against this man Patooch, what his sentence was to have been, and *then* we'll get down to the matter of his illegal removal from Earth—"

And that was it.

Fileon's face again went a ghastly off-white; the two peculiar spots of crimson that had ridden high on his cheekbones vanished as though drained off from within. Fileon could feel his craft capsizing. "Illeg—illegal removal! Why, what the hell are you talking about, m-man?"

Emory had his wedge now.

It had been a blind thrust, but it had struck vital organs.

He had suspected as much; it had all been too quick, too surreptitious, to have been legal. Patooch had been fingered-out by observers in the LedGalac organization and had been arrested without due process of a jury-mech. He was illegally entered on a deepsleep priority list.

A capital offense. Punishable by deepsleep.

He had suspected Patooch was a political prisoner—taken from Earth because Emory was interested in him—and held now through chicanery.

"We'll see what I'm talking about, Colonel."

They waited in silence, while Fileon tried vainly to categorize his requisitions. Several times he made guttural starting attempts to worm information from Emory, but the dark-eyed man sat in stolid reserve.

Eventually, the Kalaxian returned. He carried with him a scan-folder, notched for entry into the branch receptacle of Manuvac's priority lists. He laid it on the Colonel's desk, saluted from the heart, and left the office. Fileon placed a trembling hand on the file, and began, "Why don't we discuss this in the light of—"

"The file, Colonel."

Fileon licked his dry lips and unsealed the folder. It was empty of personnel data, background sheets and legal transcripts of the jury-mech decision.

But where the sentence was to

have been stated in, a clerk had written:

2 YEARS DEEPSLEEP.

Emory spun the folder around, looked at it carelessly.

"There seems to have been some slight discrepancy in your records, Colonel." A vicious smirk twisted Emory's mouth.

Fileon seemed to be making a bad habit of pulling and wetting his lips.

"Now, Colonel," Emory decided to move for the killing blow. There was finality in the way he said it: "Now, Colonel." Fileon watched him with a growing awareness that he was being stalked, that he was in serious trouble, though of what nature he had no idea.

"I don't know what story you were fed, Colonel," Emory began, formulating the final stages of his bluff, the bluff he had decided on the trip out from Earth that would have the best chance of succeeding, if Patooch *had* been kidnapped. "But I tell you this: The Lederman Galactic organization's hold in the Congress is a temporary one, at best. Alliances and favors are tenuous things."

"But—I thought you said you were *with*—?"

"There are wheels within wheels, Colonel. The man on top today may be the man on the bottom tomorrow. Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

There was the sound of a scythe through the office.

Fileon made a small move and there was no denying he knew; he understood precisely what Emory meant. The bluff was a heavy one, but one guaranteed to pull its own weight.

"You are on the bottom?"

Emory made a sliding motion with his hand. "Not on top, not on the bottom. Moving both ways at the same time."

Ambiguity. Fileon was confused. Emory liked it just that way. "What do you want from me? You know," and there was mock bravado in his voice, "I *could* just incarcerate you here, and no one would ever hear of you again. I have nothing to lose. You *might* have been lost in space, you know."

"Point signals, Colonel."

Emory said it very softly, because he meant he had been periodically beeping position/condition. It also meant his ship would continue its periodic beep until he stopped it; by coded-out block and retina pattern. The Colonel knew Emory was safe. Check . . . but no mate.

"As to what I want, Colonel, I've already told you. I want Patooch."

"No."

There was the sort of utter finality in the way the man answered, a tinge of defeat and helplessness, that he knew he was slashing his own throat but was powerless to stop himself, that was clearly identifiable. It was the word and the way of saying the word that Emory could not rebuff. Fileon was backed to the

wall; he had been really scared by LedGalac when they had delivered the little Patooch. The Guard had been scared by Lederman, and the Guard had scared Fileon.

"They put it to you pretty strong, is that it?"

The Colonel's eyes were dead as he nodded.

"You know there are forces that want this man."

Emory was arguing with a corpse.

Fileon sighed, and bothered his lips with his tongue. "I know. If I obey one group, the other will surely ruin me. It has happened before. Up till now I have been very lucky." He smiled faintly, "But the irony is, they have nothing left, really, to ruin." There was sorrow directed at his own soft character as he quietly added, "After a while it gets very easy to be a toady." He bent to his paperwork.

"Destroy me if that's all that will please you, but leave me alone. I'm awfully tired."

Emory felt no pity for Fileon. He had come this far, and there was further, much further to go. He could not afford pity. Particularly since he knew the cowardice that lay beneath his own superficial hardness—knew it, identified with it, despised it. But there was a job to be done here, or Lederman would have gotten away with it—with the affronts, with the calculated ruin of Emory's life, with the death of Dorothy, with all of it—Lederman

would have won again, as he always had.

"I have a solution for you."

Fileon looked up. Oh, you're still here, was the expression. He let his eyes linger momentarily with Emory's. "What is it?"

"How long does Patooch have to sleep?"

"It said two years. They said that should be the minimum, when they brought him here."

"You know that's a capital offense. Illegally placing someone on Manuvac's priority lists without a jury-mech decision."

"I know."

Emory stood up, and paced about the room. He came back and leaned over Fileon's desk. "I want him for one month."

"I can't do it."

"Three weeks"

"I can't do it."

"I'll have you broken, damn you!"

"I still can't do it."

"Three lousy weeks . . . two . . . a great deal depend—"

"I can't do it." Implacably, resignedly.

"All right, then, how's this: you have mercenary service, haven't you? A man can sell part of his sentence? For the ones who can afford it? If the mercenary is acceptable on Manuvac's lists?"

"Yes, but in this case, I can't do it."

Emory wanted to throttle the frightened officer. "Shut up a minute." Fileon bridled, but Emory stared him down; the officer was totally shattered now. "I'll

serve half his sentence in deep-sleep."

Fileon's jaw hinges were made of taffy.

"You're not serious."

"I have no time for foolishness, sir."

"I say I'm willing to take a year in deepsleep, so I can get Patooch loose. As long as he serves his time, you have an out, don't you? They can't ruin you if you've done precisely as you're told, isn't that true?"

Fileon wet his lips. *Oh, Lord, thought Emory exasperatedly, the military mind.*

"Well . . ."

"I'll let you place me in deepsleep for one year, at the end of which time both Patooch and myself will be free. That can't possibly conflict with any doctrines. I know if you have mercenary conscription, this can't be objected to. You won't be doing anything against the rules."

Fileon's face was a mask of futility. "You don't seem to be able to grasp what I'm telling you, Mr. Emory. What I'm saying is that this Patooch was brought to me, and I was *ordered*—can you understand what I mean by that word, sir, after twenty-three years at this post—I was *ordered* to put a man into deepsleep illegally. For two years. Isn't it enough I've stolen two years of a man's life? Don't you think that bothers me, Mr. Emory? But to throw everything away . . . no, I can't. Twenty-three years is a long time, Mr.

Emory. The third of a man's life. I can't chance it, I just can't.

"I have no place to go from here..."

Despite himself, Emory felt some of the sense of terror and aloneness Fileon generated. It washed across the space between them; space doubly-magnified by Emory's anxiety to free Patooch, and his lack of feeling for Fileon. Yet the sense of *knowing*, was there, and Emory had the impression *There, but for the grace of Lederman, go I.*

For an instant Emory had a backward vision of the years... and a glimpse of the future... and the sound of the scythe was sibilant in the room. He remained silent a while.

There was a chill here.

"I understand your position, Colonel, believe me, I do," Emory leaned closer, trying a new approach, trying to put the feeling of chill from himself. "But there is more at stake here than mere politics. My life is involved, and I won't go into that any further."

Fileon spread his hands. "I'm sorry."

Emory knew at last he was beaten. He rose from the chair, and there were weather-marks across his face. So here it was to end; the years he had spent with the hate building, and it was to end so simply. Choked to death in red tape.

He rose from the chair—when had he sat down?—and stood staring past Fileon.

"Let's forget it, Colonel," his voice was a whisper. He started

for the door and without turning added, "It doesn't really matter."

He thought he heard Fileon's, "I'm sorry," shussing after him. But it didn't matter.

He was at the lock of his ship when the Kalaxian pounded up behind him. "The Colonel wishes to see you, sir." Sweat filmed his forehead. The dimples rippled like pock-marks. Emory felt astonishment, like a cloak, covering him. He went inside the ship and blocked/retained the point signals off.

He followed the Kalaxian.

What had changed Fileon's mind; later he would know, but now he was astonished.

He was astonished up to the moment they lowered him, naked, into the deepsleep trough.

There was a strange sound as they lowered the clear glassite bubble over the gelatin trough. A sound like black capes whirling in the wind; a sound like softness falling from the skies. The sound of a scythe nearby.

However, an instant after the freeze set in, nothing astonished him:

He was too busy fighting for his life.

## CHAPTER 7

"GOOD afternoon. I'd like to see Dr. Pauling."

"Is Dr. Pauling expecting you?"

"No, but I assure you it's all been cleared."

"In that case I'm sorry, but



Dr. Pauling is very involved in an experiment . . . as a matter of fact, how did you manage to get past all the guards?"

"Look, I tell you it's all right. I've spent the past sixteen months getting clearances. I was passed through to speak to him."

"Well . . ."

"What is it, Berenice?"

"Oh, Dr. Pauling, this man . . ."

"Doctor Pauling, *please!* My name is Bryan Lockhardt. I'm from *Look at Life Magazine*. I don't mean to sound as though I'm whining, but it took them sixteen months to clear me for this interview."

"I'd like to help you, young man, but I can't overstep the bounds of security."

"Doctor, I'm not even interested in security-tight projects. Our readers are interested in deep-sleep. They want to know how it works, and what it means; they want to know about Manuvac; they want to know about the Billion Year Program. In short, they want to know what is what with our penal system."

"In other words, this is an explanation."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I suppose I can give you a few minutes, Mr. Lockhardt."

"Thank you, sir. But I'm afraid I'm no technician. A little college quantum mech, and that's about all. What I'm trying to do is write this for the layman. So that all the confusion that's arisen since its inception, all the changes, will be explained in simplest terms."

"Yes, I recall all the confusion when imprisonment and capital punishment were ended and the deepsleep went into effect. No one seemed to know what we were doing, and even those of us who were involved found it difficult to know what Manuvac was doing."

"That's what I want to find out, Doctor. About Manuvac."

"It took fifteen hundred men twenty-eight years to come up with that computer."

"Fifteen hun—"

"It occupies the center of an asteroid undesignated in the charts; an asteroid with its own self-inducing force shield; the brain itself is three times the size of Manhattan Island . . ."

"Fifteen *hundred*? Did I hear you correctly?"

"That's right. And the final stages weren't even handled by men. The machine did it for itself. The self-repairing, regenerating facilities. It was truly unbelievable to watch that great bulk, crammed into a massive rock, a machine many times larger than New-New York—sending its own repairmechs scuttling around, plating here, wiring there, relaying progress reports to the already-completed sections of the brain. Unbelievable . . . and frightening, sometimes."

"But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let me start at the beginning. You, of course, remember the Crowd Riots in the late Twenties and Thirties. When

New-New York, the first New York, was razed."

"Well, it was before my time, but I've read extensively on the subject."

"Of course. At any rate, after the most extreme measures were taken, and half a million innocents died, the point could no longer be rationalized or avoided: our Solar System was just too crowded. The planets we *could* use, were so densely packed they could not logically support any more. It wasn't even a matter of comfort now. The Tube-Cities underground were so crammed people were murdering their own relatives, just so they might move up the reservations lists for a one-room apartment with bathinette. Then when the mass-claustrophobia started to show up, the poor souls from underground were dumped above-ground, and we were in even worse straits."

"Along about then Wassilie came up with the force-bead, didn't he?"

"Precisely."

"Then that solved everything."

"Not quite, but it was a start. We were able to start colonizing the Outworlds using force-bead generators on our ships, but there was no plan, no system. No sense to the exodus, really. We found we were losing almost as many pioneers to the new worlds as we had lost in the Crowd Riots. Blockades were set up until some system for regulating exploration into outer

space could be devised. That was when the idea for Manuvac came up."

"Manuvac was designed to plot the progress of man through the stars. But after we had ceased work, and the brain continued to its own completion, we knew we had surpassed ourselves."

"Weren't you afraid the brain would get out of control?"

"Pfah! Boy, you've been reading too many horror stories about giant brains that run amok . . . or get aspirations of despotism. We set up Manuvac with self-inhibiting blockages. The machine itself was constructed with the Three Laws built in."

"Asimov's Laws?"

"Right. So we knew there was no danger. But the machine was truly brilliant, and it took a fact from here and a fact from there, extrapolated all to hell and gone, and came up with things no hundred men on Earth could have reasoned."

"Like what?"

"Like, for instance, that there was intelligent life on P. Centauri Nine. Or that we had to have a set program for colonization that would take a billion years to conduct properly."

"So the Billion Year Program."

"So the Billion Year Program. Correct."

"And what was that?"

"Well. Manuvac drew its conclusions, there in the heart of the asteroid. Before we knew

what was happening, it was issuing coordinates for planets we didn't even know existed, for systems on the other side of the Galactic Divide. Further, it was giving detailed instructions on what the settlers would encounter, what they should do to survive, and particularly, certain problems the brain insisted *must* be solved."

"You mean the brain extrapolated all that?"

"Precisely. It was a peculiar thing; they've advanced theories that the brain has mechanical equivalents of ESP. That or some law of physics we haven't even begun to imagine exists. Because it was pulling planets out of thin air and shipping settlers out to them, handling even socio-economic problems. Things the Manuvac shouldn't have known, things so far out, we couldn't even find the planets with our highest-frequency telescopes. But Manuvac had the cords and sent the ships out. That was when we found out about the Billion Year Program. Manuvac was—and is—planning our future for us."

"But benevolently."

"No, not even that. Dispassionately. Detachedly. The brain knew what problems we'd hit, and it was starting to smooth them, a billion years before we encountered them."

"How did the deepsleep enter into all this?"

"After a while, we had more settlers than Manuvac wanted to send out, for some reason or

other. Part of the Billion Year Program, we all supposed. So it started the preference lists, and later Manuvac began eliminating people from it. Their names would come up, and the brain would register them inappropriate. So we knew the Program was well underway and Manuvac wanted certain types for certain jobs."

"I don't understand."

"Neither did we, at first."

"So?"

"So when a certain person's name came up on the list, and we thought that person was eminently suited, Manuvac would skip down and take some dervish, or a criminal. After a while we began to realize that the others were pure settler types, squatters actually, and not pioneers who could handle the dangers of these Outworlds. So one day someone came up with the bright idea of using convicted criminals for the really rugged Outworld jobs."

"Then came the deepsleep."

"Yes, then Mitchell and Luke-tina and I came up with the deepsleep."

"That was rather sudden, wasn't it?"

"Heh."

"Excuse me, sir. Did I say something wrong?"

"No . . ."

"You look so odd, sir."

"I wonder if it's time to tell. I wonder if you're the man to tell."

"I've been cleared—"

"This is bigger than security."

It might be too much—and yet . . .”

“Excuse me?”

“I wonder.”

“Wonder *what*, Doctor?”

“No man invented deepsleep, Lockhardt.”

“No man invent—what are you talking about?”

“That’s right. Mitchell and Luketina and I took the credit; that was Congressional policy on the matter. We didn’t want to alarm the public.”

“Then, who . . .”

“That’s right.”

“You mean . . . Manuvac?”

“Correct again, Mr. Lockhardt. Manuvac needed a way of insuring the continuation of the Billion Year Program, so it invented deepsleep, and gave it to us. Then it had a way of getting all the right type of men and women it needed. It just eliminated capital punishment and imprisonment in one fell swoop, and used criminal types—which seemed to be the most aggressive types—in exchange for their prison sentences.”

“Is this the first anyone’s known of this?”

“Other than top secret communiques, between those who knew and *had* to know . . . yes.”

“Then why let it out now?”

“Oh . . . many reasons.”

“But why now?”

“Well, actually, there are two real reasons. Aside from the fact that you generate a certain trust, Mr. Lockhardt.”

“I’m flattered, Doctor.”

“Perhaps it’s just that the

weight of this has grown too much for me. I’m getting old, as I say.”

“I can’t believe that, sir.”

“You may be right. I don’t know. Things have gone very fast for the human race of late. Very fast, for me. Perhaps too fast. I don’t know.”

“You said there were two reasons, sir.”

“Yes; first, there was a drastic shift of power in the C. G. ten years ago. There can be no policy repercussion from my telling you. And second, more important, the public accepts Manuvac and deepsleep. It’s part of their life now, they’ve grown up with it . . . and it’s about time they knew. I’ve held onto the secret long enough; I think my fellow man has asked enough of me to bear it alone these years. Mitchell and Luketina were the lucky ones. They died.”

“Sir . . . I . . .”

“No, that’s all right. Listen: it had to come out eventually, and as long as it was inevitable, I’d rather see you do it properly than some Sunday supplement sensationalist.”

“I’m flattered, sir. And a little worried.”

“No reason to be worried. Manuvac is a harmless tool of man. It plots our destiny, but without an axe to grind.”

“This is an article in itself.”

“I suppose it is. But it’s all part of the story of deepsleep. Now I suppose you’ll want to know just how deepsleep works, eh?”

"I'm still not quite over that last revelation."

"You'll get used to it. I did."

"Wheew! I hope so, sir. But go on, please."

"Well. Deepsleep is a process of breaking down the subtle radiations and electrical waves that make up the thinking brain. Those waves, what we call the 'packet', what you might call the soul . . . in effect the essence that is the *individual* . . . are transmitted across space, by a process of which we have no conception—one of Manuvac's little concepts that has left our best minds at sea—into the pre-designated mind of a native creature on the planet chosen."

"Mind-transference?"

"Essentially, yes. But it's more than that. While the body of the thinker is asleep, actually frozen in a gelatin trough, his packet takes over the body of the alien creature. Detailed instructions as to what the particular problem to be solved on the world may be are imbedded in the sleeper's mind, and when he takes over the alien body, he is equipped physically to do it."

"I see. But how do you insure the thinker does the job?"

"His parole."

"Oooh."

"Correct. The thinker gets time off from his sentence if the job is done properly."

"The incentive method."

"That's right."

"But what if the thinker does not do the job properly?"

"They always have. Manuvac selects from the lists of available people, and it's never chosen a man or woman who wasn't mentally constructed to do the job as assigned."

"Then no one has any way of knowing where a certain thinker's packet may be. And the thinker doesn't know what world he's on. Only Manuvac knows all the facts."

"Yes."

"What happens if the person does the job, is ready to go back to his body, but he has a longer sentence to serve?"

"He's re-shifted. Sent to another world, another body."

"How long does that go on? Until he's served his sentence, or until he's 'good-jobbed' his way to a parole?"

"Right again, Mr. Lockhardt."

"Well, that doesn't sound too bad."

"It wouldn't be, except for one minor detail."

"Which is?"

"Which is the high mortality rate. Because while the dreamer's packet is in the alien body, if that body dies—the dreamer dies."

"If the alien doesn't survive . . . then the thinker doesn't survive. How ghastly."

"Not at all. It's the old life-and-death struggle, and if a man wants to live badly enough, he comes through and solves the problem assigned him. Weaklings die, strong men come back even stronger, and very few can't

take their place in normal society. There is a higher ratio of rehabilitation under this system than there was with the old penal arrangement."

"But these worlds are really deadly?"

"From what we can tell, from what little Manuvac bothers to tell us—and even the dreamer doesn't know what world he's on, or where it is—the problems and the worlds involved are the most taxing we can imagine."

"It doesn't seem right, somehow."

"It may not seem right, but it's made a strong, star-spanning race of us."

"Well, I don't want to take all your time, Dr. Pauling. You seem to want to get on with that experiment. I have just one more question, sir."

"Yes?"

"What would happen if an unscrupulous person wanted to make use of deepsleep. I mean illegally. For instance, to rid himself of a love-rival, or a business threat, or someone he hated?"

"That's a capital offense, punishable by the maximum in deepsleep."

"But what if?"

"No one would be that ridiculous."

"Yes, but what if?"

"It's not impossible. Just highly improbable. No one voluntarily goes into deepsleep, and it would *have* to come to light if someone was illegally forced into the trough. Besides, Manuvac knows all. No, I don't con-

sider it in the realm of feasibility."

"Yes, but what if . . . ?"

## CHAPTER 8

IT WOULDN'T have been so deadly, had he been a man.

But he wasn't, he was a lizard of some sort.

Cal Emory dropped the filtering eyelids over his double-irised eyes, all nine of them, and stared up at the blinding five suns. *I am on Spyna*, he thought, and the thought was not reassuring. *I have 365 days to go on this world; 365 days Earth-time, which is fifty days this world's time. More than fifty, just slightly, but close enough so the difference doesn't matter. Then I'll be a man again, and Patooch, and a new face, and Ledgerman will be repaid in coin.*

Then the lizard-eater fell screaming from the skies; on leathery wings it broke from the fluted ends of a cloudbank and ripped air—an air with very little oxygen in it—to fall on its prey.

Emory's mind was a weird mixture of man-thoughts and lizard-thoughts, and for an instant he stared up, directly into the emerald eyes and thrusting, razored beak of the lizard-eater. It wouldn't have been so deadly, had he been a man, for the lizard-eater was only the size of a small buzzard, but he was not a man; he was a lizard, three feet from blunt nose-snout to split tail-tip.

The lizard-eater screeched down on him, and Emory felt himself being submerged for the lizard's true mind. He knew what a lizard would do in such a situation, and the man-thoughts rode along submissively. Survival finds ways.

As the lizard-eater plummeted toward the ground, Emory let himself go slack, flattening. His central torso elongated, thinned, became almost disc-like, with legs thrusting out in eight directions like spokes from a hub. The body was stiff, and as the lizard-eater fell hungrily toward him . . . at the final instant possible before the strike . . .

Emory sailed himself away. By rigid muscle concentration, he sped at terrific speed for a short distance, rose into the air, and skimmed away like a plate.

The lizard-eater followed.

Again, Emory sailed himself away.

After a long time, the lizard-eater gave up, and rose, leathery wings beating off-rhythm, into the azure sky.

Emory lay in the hollow at the base of a thornberry bush, and settled into his more normal shape. He was exhausted; it had taken three hours skimming to lose the hungry creature. Three hours, and he found himself more exhausted, more hungry than he had ever been when a human.

Automatically, his tongue lashed out, snaring a tight cluster of thornberries, and he

downed them without tasting them.

When his hunger had been satiated, he settled back to sleep; his lizard-mind went down like a pod in a whirlpool, and his man-thoughts rose to annoy him.

He thought: one year here. One year. My God, how will I stand it . . . this body, this hideous body with its eight legs and its forked tongue. I'll go crazy.

At that point, what Manuvac had placed in his mind, came to the fore. He knew his problem, and he knew he must solve it.

The problem was a simple one—for a man impossible—but a simple one for a lizard. If the lizard knew how to maneuver eighteen billion worms with no minds to speak about. Of course, he was lizard and that made a difference, but still, it was simple.

Simple.

But staggering.

He had to rid a desert of a gorgeous poinsetta-like plant. By worm-power.

The lizard that was Cal Emory slept then. Secure that sometime in the future, in a foreseeable but incalculably distant future, he would be a man again, and could return to his body.

When he awoke he had a brisk thornberry meal. Then he set off. His loping gait, eight-legged and occasionally broken by the sailing movement, carried him swiftly from the rain forest, into the desert. The problem had to be solved.



The plants grew in madcap profusion. Scarlet as a sea of spilled blood they rioted up and across the horizon, as far as his lizard eyes could see. They hurt the sight, they were so brilliant. For an instant he was ashamed and saddened that they must all die. They were man-thoughts, however, and as he lay belly-close to the warm golden sands, other Manuvac thoughts intruded; he saw the future as though it were a frieze on the retina of his mind. He saw these same poinsettia-like plants, one hundred Earth-years later, saw them releasing their pollen into the atmosphere in great clouds. He saw the pollen sifted and tossed by the desert winds, saw invisible spores caught in the up-drafts and whirled away to the other side of this beautiful, strange-to-Emory planet where they rained down on a tiny cluster of corridor-joined quonsets and a great silver ship.

He saw men hack and cough and clutch their throats, and some spit blood and phlegm. He saw them tumble to the ground, and he saw the rain forest finally close in over the cleared compound, years after the men from the silver ship had merged with the soil they had come to conquer.

Once every hundred years, they spored.

And for three hundred years thereafter . . . the atmosphere was poisoned for Earthman.

So Cal Emory prepared to

convince eighteen billion worms that they wanted to eat stamen and pistil, leaf and bud of that desert-full of gorgeous blossoms. He had never spoken to a worm before. He wasn't sure he knew the proper protocol.

The clump of goldenrod—for want of a better name—hid a small, ragged-edged burrow in its midst. Emory sniffed across the desertland, looking for such an opening, and when the acrid odor of the worm-burrow came to him, he veered and followed the stench till he found the black opening.

His nictating eyelids flipped up, and he set a pair of forepaws over the humped lip of the burrow. From the ebony interior of the hole a foul, swirling odor assailed his lizard's nostrils; his sense of smell was unbearably acute, and the human within the beast's mind, gagged.

He slid belly-scuttle into the hole.

It went down at a thirty-degree angle, and he was able, by extending his claws, to keep a solid purchase in the tunnel. The darkness lightened for him as he descended; the walls seemed to be coated with a luminous, sticky substance. It might have been spittle, had the tunnel not been the passageway for worms. Whatever the source, the tunnel glowed faintly, and with the eyelids snapped up he was able to maneuver with ease.

The smell rose up from below in cloying waves.

Emory passed dozens of side-

corridors, and from their egg-shaped openings the raw, live, *pulsing* smell of worm life reached him.

For an instant he paused, his eight feet holding him steady on their claws, and he felt his sanity tremble. *I've got to stay up-right, he thought, or Fileon will take a maniac out of that deep-sleep tank. How many more days?*

A tremor reached him through the soil of the tunnel around him. His blunt head came up, and his eyes glinted in the dark. What was it?

The lizard in him knew.

The rains were coming.

And when they came, these tunnels felt the chill of the coming cold, and with a fantastic suddenness all the water that could not be absorbed by the cracked, solid floor of the desert was dumped down the worm-holes. He made as if to go forward, down the tunnel, but the lizard he was, the lizard he could not submerge completely, knew what it would mean. It would be a drowning death. The lizard painfully turned in the tunnel...

It took a long time to turn, and as the lizard loped back up the tunnel, the first droplets of rain came cascading down the slope. The lizard that had been born a man felt terror grip its mind. It could see itself washed down the slope, into the pit at the bottom where the worm-tunnels radiated in all directions—filling with torrential rain, and

rising, rising, cutting off the life. The lizard raced madly up the slope.

Even as it emerged, it was unsure it had left the tunnel; only the commanding chill of the suddenly-darkened desert assured him he was free.

Great clouds had massed themselves in what seemed a fantastically short time, and the rain pummelled the desert floor with a many-tempoed tattoo. The poinsettias bowed beneath the onslaught, but they drank, and the lizard knew they would only draw nourishment from this deluge.

The rain beat at him, and his sleek green hide glistened as the moisture ran off him in a thousand streams. For now, he had been beaten back—by the elements. But the rain would stop soon... a few months... more than a few... but soon... and he would once again go down the slope into the world of the worms.

*I have a year, he mused, loping off for the charcoal bulk of the mountains. I can wait. I'll have to wait.*

He streaked out across the desert, his eight legs whipping and scissoring under him, sending him on his way at a speed calculated to cover the greatest amount of terrain in the shortest amount of time. He beat forward steadily, till the desert gave way to bottomland, and the bottomland gave way to foothill, and the foothill smoothed up into bluffs, and the bluffs became

the hills, and the hills joined into mountains.

And there, under a lip overhang that drizzled the shrieking wind and the pounding rain away, he found a niche, with gray-moss growing from its moist walls. The lizard pulled gobbets of moss from the cracks in which it grew, and piling it fretfully in one depression far back in the niche, settled itself for sleep.

The desert was a crazy-quilt. The huge pools of sucking mud made brown leper spots in the gold of the cracked sand. The riot of crimson poinsettias added a wild note, and black stains where lower levels of dirt had been revealed in scar obviousness made a map of many hues, with no reason and no beauty.

The lizard picked its way carefully across the desert now, its sense of smell confused by the cleansing of the rain that had held power for three Earth-months. On every side worms that had been washed up from their grottos lay white and stinking in grotesque, twined death.

Emory blessed the tiny mind of the lizard that had saved his life. Images of himself in the tunnel when the rain hit with fury force bit at him, and he put them from him with an effort.

Finally, the lizard found the clump of goldenrod, and nosed it aside to gain the tunnel.

Mud.

It was filled.

The lizard moved away from the goldenrod, and settled itself back on four legs . . . to ponder. At this point, the smell of the tunnels would be gone. The rain had done its work to perfection. And even if another opening should be found, how long would it sink before its water level was reached?

The lizard watched a pair of worms slithering past, heading somewhere, as it tried to unravel its dilemma. There was undoubtedly a new set of tunnels somewhere in this basin the worms had dug when they had made their way up from below-ground. He knew this was so, for hadn't he just seen a pair of . . .

The answer came to him with clarity, with abruptness. The worms had little more than trained reflexes, no minds, but they had one thing—the thing he had been informed by Manuvac would enable him to convince the worms they must eat the flowers—and that one thing was *group-sentience*.

Each part of the cultural whole knew the thoughts of every other part. Each segment, each disjointed, maggot-colored worm crawling through darkness, knew the rapport that joined him to all other worms.

As high as the worm king, as low as the two who had slithered past him a moment before, they all knew the new tunnels, they all headed home eventually.

The lizard took off after the worms.

It had been a tedious job of tracking. After the Spyna equivalent of ten Earth-days keeping close in behind the worms, they had headed dead-on for the rim of the desert basin, and Emory had felt a nameless gratitude well up in him as they had disappeared down a concealed tunnel between two shards of rock tumbled at the foot of a hilly rise.

He had descended into that lightless, glowing, moist, hard-packed depth. He had explored a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand side-corridors, and had followed uncounted scores of worms slithering along in their one-eyed journeys. He had starved for days and gagged constantly from the rankly overpowering odor of worms that lived and died in the bowels of this world.

Only the sick off-green glow of the slime the worms excreted as they dragged themselves along, kept Emory from complete madness. After a while, even with the faint light to see by—or perhaps because of its nightmarish qualities—he felt he was dead, in hell, and this was his punishment.

He had no idea how long he had spent in this body. It seemed like forever, he had always been a lizard, down a worm hole, looking for a worm king to eat some really red, really important—were they important?—flowers.

*Who am I?*

*What . . . ?*

Then, he had found a track

wider than the others. He had followed the track for endless days and endless miles, and once he had thought he was a man again, crawling on all eight. But that had passed, and he knew for certain he was a worm.

He fainted several times from hunger and sickness, and only after a great deal of time had passed—time he could neither mark nor comprehend—was he able to resume the search of the wide track with any kind of concentration. His head ached terribly, and once he tried to rub it with a hand he did not have.

Finally, the track turned, dipped, turned and turned again, and came out in a great, glowing cavern. It was great and glowing for the worm . . . for him it was roomy and visible. At the far end of the room, the worm king lay in its slime puddle.

Then began the slow process of reaching the creature. This was a hereditary ruler of all the worms on the planet. Its one eye watched him without lid or looseness. It was a monstrous white eye in a patty of soggy flesh. The thick, segmented sausage-roll of the worm's body lay coiled in the slime puddle.

And Emory communicated.

In the way that lizards spoke, he spoke.

In the way worms refuse to listen, it refused to listen. But Emory was the stronger; he attacked again, and sent his thoughts against the plastic buffer of the worm's mind. For the group-sentience had been

mutated over tens of thousands of years, and from its crude beginnings had come one worm in each generation that had the barest tendrils of reasoning power. This was that worm.

The worm king, who commanded all worms with a thought, for all thoughts were his thoughts, and all his thoughts were everyworm's thoughts.

Emory tried to reach that powerful group sentience, and the cajoling, the smiting, the attacking by craft and by creeping went on for a long time.

Until the threats that a lizard can make a worm had been made. Until the reasons for obeying a worm can find within itself had been found. Until the payment two creatures can extend had been proffered. Then, the great worm thought went out, and it was brief:

*Eat, my kinsmen! Eat the roots and the stalks, the buds and the blossoms of the red flowers. I will you to eat, fill your soft bellies with the red flowers, for I have been breached, and I have commanded you. Eat, then! Eat, eat, eat, eat . . .*

And as Emory crawled back through the tunnels, more weeks trying to find his way out of the underground worm nation before him, the call echoed and re-echoed. He was passed by hundreds of worms, heading in one direction, and he reasoned they were on their way to the feast awaiting them aboveground. He trailed them, and they led him unerringly to the surface.

The sun had gone down months before, and the stars hung over the desert in a breathless closeness that made the man within the lizard want to weep.

Then the lizard chewed a cluster of thornberries, dragged itself under the bulk of a clump of goldenrod, and slept again . . . this time with peace.

The job had been accomplished.

Now the year on Spyna would end successfully. Manuvac would release him. He lay there, and the night of many days passed quickly.

Then, one day, when the lizard was basking its belly in the warming rays of the sun, high on a bluff, overlooking a desert of gold, free of all red stains, Cal Emory felt a drain on his mind. He felt a wrench, and a lurch, and a whining in his ears, and he thought:

*It's over. It's over at last. I'll be a man again when I open my eyes. Thank God . . . Patooch, you're free . . . and I'm on my way, Lederman . . . I'm on my way . . .*

## CHAPTER 9

OUT of the northwest came a holy man.

Clad in a knee-length jumper the color of burnt grass, a crescent-shaped area shaved bald on the back of his head, his feet bound up in thonged sandals, and a sacramental crook in his right hand, he made his way across the rolling greensward.

He stood for a timeless moment at the crest of a swelling hill, then took a step and \* \* \* a half mile away, the sun shining down so he made to shade his eyes with his free hand, he reappeared and took a second step \* \* \* now much closer, and smiling with unhidden joy at the measure of life coursing in him, and stepped \* \* \* once again, in half-mile strides.

The holy man "teeped." Teleportation; the instantaneous transportation of matter, the ultimate method of travel. The holy man's name was Rowss.

He came teaching a great message. He came to spread the gospel of war. His name was Cal Emory, and he was trapped.

The World was Wellspring of Peace, and it had been founded by men and women who had fled a great war once; people who lived peace as conscientiously as near-fanaticism would allow. As with the majority of intelligent races in the universe, they possessed near-total control of their minds; and the ability to teleport, to move in one step \* \* \* to another place, was an integral part of their culture. Basically, teleportation and the unswerving, dedicated *necessity* of peace were the two pillars of their civilization.

So now came a holy man from the northwest. A man whose Peaceful name was Rowss—a word that meant Omen—and who carried a dictate from a machine.

Manuvac had set Cal Emory

into the mind of a lizard, and now it had drawn his essence across the star-routes, to a world buried deep in the dust-heaps, where a new mission awaited him.

Finally, with the certainty of the finality of death, he heard the sound of a scythe, and it was the sound of his eternal imprisonment in bodies other than his own. He knew he had been tricked. He had awakened in the body of Rowss, and for a moment—but only that moment—he thought a mistake had been made. But he had lost even that trace of naivete quickly, for he had been shanghied by Fileon. He was doomed to waste away in a hundred, a thousand . . . who knew how many *million* bodies, until the end of time. For the body that was Cal Emory would stay alive in that trough on The Stone, regenerated and maintained in a preserved state, until the mind was killed in some alien body.

He had been taken from one body, merely to inhabit another. So this was the way it would go . . . like this forever. He would be hurled like a pelota across the spaceways, through light-years that were nothing for a mind without a body. He had been betrayed by Fileon and this was to be his end. A life with no end. A life that was a hundred thousand lives. Without purpose, with a hundred thousand purposes. He was a many-times savior of mankind, and the role did not suit him. The fever for

revenge burned in him. But how could he do it? His initial search for Patooch, his efforts to free the one-eyed man had now turned into an eternal nightmare trap of deepsleep transfers.

Yet the Emory that lived within Rowss still railed at his fleshly confinement, and swore it would smash free one day, to return to The Stone, to find Patooch, to kill Lederman.

And he was a holy man, who could teleport. He knew it as "teeping," but it meant he was able to will himself anywhere, by mind power, if he could visualize it in his mind's eye.

It would be worse this year. And the problem was a more difficult one:

Teach the people of a completely idyllically happy and peaceful planet to prepare for war. A word they had consciously tried to forget over three hundred years. Teach them hate and killing and war, for another race was soon to wage war on them, and Manuvac felt this people would be better saved than the invaders, for it watched out on Man's behalf, and the problem between Man and human from Wellspring of Peace would be far less than those of Man and the creatures who even now planned their invasion of This Sleepy World.

He was Cal Emory who was Rowss who was a holy man whose motive was the corruption of a good people, a peaceful people.

He hated himself, but he had the problem, and he could only

do it the best way he knew how . . . for wasn't it to his benefit, and the benefit of all Mankind?

He \* \* \* down the hillside, into a pool of shadow, where he lay his crook down, and rested.

It had been such a long way, so many years, and now without hope or the end of his vendetta in sight. He settled from a crouch into a supine attitude, and closed his eyes.

He heard a silent sibilance of smoothing something:

"Would you like a drink?" she asked, so he opened his eyes.

She was quite tall, perhaps a head taller than himself, but she carried her height well, and the sashed wraparound she wore accentuated rather than concealed the soft contours of her young body. Emory pegged her age at nineteen . . . perhaps younger.

She had silvery hair, common on this world, bound up in a swirl at the top of her head. It was reserved, yet becoming. Her face was long and the hollows just under her high cheekbones were exotic in a special way. There were character lines in her face, peculiar for a girl so young, but they were not distracting. Her nose was small, with what Emory called an Irish tilt, her ears were finely-molded and close to her head. Her mouth was wide—perhaps a shade *too* wide for any accurate comparison with classical standards of beauty, but the full lower lip hinted broadly at sensuality. She was standing before him, barefooted, extend-



ing a horn filled with a dark, musky-smelling liquid.

Emory decided he liked her looks very much.

He started to rise.

"Oh, please don't get up. I saw you walking from the farm, and recognized your colors. Mother suggested I come up and offer you a drink." She proffered the horn again, and he placed the smell as *doss*, pressed from the grape of the same name.

"Thank you very much," he smiled up at her. He took the horn, and watched her over the lip as she \* \* \* down beside him.

He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, and tried to give the horn back to her. She let an antic smile tickle the corners of her lips, "No, please. Keep it. We'll teep more *doss* into it from time to time to keep you slaked on your journey."

"Your father must be quite sensitive. I may be quite a long ways from here before I've reached the end of my journey."

"My father is dead," she said softly. "I do all the teeping for the family. Mother doesn't travel very much."

He looked at her appraisingly. A girl with that much mental power—to \* \* \* *doss* across-country into the horn, wherever it might be—was a remarkable girl indeed.

Emory felt a peculiar attraction to her. Something he had not felt—he realized with an alarming start — since he had known Dorothy. *This is ridiculous*, he chastised himself men-

tally. She's a child . . . and I'm not who I'm supposed to be. I'm an alien, and she's on a world whose location to Earth I don't even know. I'll be gone from here in a year, if I don't die in this body, and a lifetime of other bodies waiting for me. Stop thinking such thoughts. It isn't right. It wouldn't be fair.

"What's your name?" he asked. Her eyes were level and honest.

"Lexa-Lüra."

"You're very lovely, Lexa," Emory said. She had the perspicacity not to blush. He liked that.

"Would you wait here a moment?" she asked. He nodded.

\* \* \*

Where had she gone, he wondered?

\* \* \* "Mother would very much like to meet you, uh—" she groped for a name he had not offered.

"Rowss is my name, and I come from—"

"That isn't necessary, Rowss. Where you come from is something else again. But mother asks if you would consider dining with us. It isn't very fattening, but it's healthy, and there's plenty of it. Would you, please? And tell us your message?"

Emory did not want to pass on his ideas of war and killing, but he was drawn to this girl, and he smiled at her with what he was certain was a silly grin. "I'd be delighted."

They \* \* \* down off the hills

together, and though he had difficulty with the final teep, for he could not see the farm from where his previous \* \* \* had landed him, she corrected his \* \* \* and they appeared in the courtyard of the farmhouse a few seconds after they had left the hills.

Emory spent the night with Mother Liira and her lovely daughter; he met the two younger sons Walk and Mondri whose ambition it was to teep a great dam across the roiling Ond Sound. It was a lofty ambition, and Emory talked far into the night with them, offering his own suggestions. Once they \* \* \* to the shore of the Sound, and he illustrated a point that they seemed to find untenable. Back in the farmhouse, they re-discussed the point, and Emory was forced to concede.

These were brilliant people, this Liira family. He hated himself for having to bring war to them. But it was either an awareness of war on their part, or complete annihilation when the creatures from the outer dark came.

He stayed a week, far longer than he had planned, and when he found it time to go, three things occurred that told him what the year on Wellspring of Peace would be like:

The sons had lost their interest in the Ond Sound dam and wanted to join an army, any army.

Lexa begged him to take her along on his journey, and he

consented, because her loveliness hurt him with its absence.

He damned himself for taking advantage of her, but the year on Wellspring of Peace would go so much faster with a beautiful girl who was devoted to him; and it would make the spreading of his gospel that much easier.

The third thing:

Mother Liira smashed the horn, deliberately, venomously.

Her eyes were cold; they reminded Emory of the eyes of the hunting creature that had dropped from the sky on him when he was a lizard, how many lives ago?

The first city they came to was Anyman's Good.

It was a de-centralized city, with supply routes spread out across the countryside, for with the ability to teep, all transportation had become obsolete—indeed, had never existed—and so commuters lived three hundred miles away, and goods were \* \* \* into the city without clogging traffic.

He set up his gospel platform in the street, and Lexa caught them initially with her singing and dancing. A voice as clear and mellow as the brooks that ran over shining stones. A body as full as a woman's, yet possessing the gamin sweetness of a child. It was modulated sex that brought them, but it was his fiery invective, his raging and exhorting about the greatness and fury of WAR that held them!

Like a fad, it interested the

curious at first. Then, with the primal simplicity of it, with the basic call it had on every human, they began listening to his preaching with more interest.

Rowss became a household name, and his \* \* \* was from city to city as the fire of fury spread like a locust plague. Eventually, as the months passed, and his preaching assumed the proportions of a national menace, the token forces of law on Well-spring of Peace—for without war and crime, why was there a need for police?—took action.

They came to him in the night. Somehow he managed to take Lexa and \* \* \* away from there.

Then came days of running. With the ability to teep, they found living proof of why law enforcement on Wellspring of Peace would be difficult to maintain. They were the closest thing to criminals the world had known in three hundred years, and they \* \* \* from place to place without effort. What cop could track them when the could \* \* \* to the other side of the planet in the wink of an eye.

Everywhere Emory was, as Rowss the holy man, he spread his gospel of war. And like an influenza epidemic, it caught and held the imagination of a race who had so submerged themselves in peace, that there was action and imagination in what he proposed.

They had been ripe, as Manuvac had known; the great brain had selected the body of a native, and put into it the mind of a man

who knew hate, who knew killing and violence. For a man of Well-spring of Peace would not have been equipped to do the job.

But the fury that gnawed in Cal Emory was just right, and Manuvac had known this and chosen correctly.

The year was nearly finished, and Emory had spent much of that year fleeing. He had spread seeds of hatred and war in fertile soil. Now he had only to wait . . .

Till Fileon's treachery manifested itself again, and sent him scudding off into space, into another body. How long . . . how long would this horror last? He tinkered with the idea of slashing his wrists.

The final night, Emory lay on his back in a haymow, the girl Lexa beside him. Emory looked down on her, and bent slowly to touch her lips with his fingertips. She stirred, and looked up at him.

"I should say something to you, Lexa, something that would make you feel secure," he said gently. He knew he would be going soon, and another mind would surge into Rowss' body. The mind that had been Rowss . . . who would suffer for what Emory had done.

"I feel secure," she said, and had the depth of perception not to add an endearment.

"No, something should be said," he insisted. "If I tell you something, Lexa, will you believe me?"

She nodded, and the hay rustled beneath her silver hair.

"Lexa—"

It was difficult. No, fantastic, and why should she believe it?"

"Do you want to tell me you are not Rowss?"

His amazement clogged his speech for an instant.

She continued, "I've known it for a long time. Whoever you are, you have ways of doing things, ways of speaking, approaches to problems—as you said once—that are foreign. I don't know who you really are, but it doesn't matter. I've made my decisions."

He felt something warm on his cheek. He ignored it, knowing what it was. "Lexa, there are many things in the world . . . this world and the billions of others you don't even know exist . . . that sometimes conspire to make the impossible happen."

"You're right, of course, I'm not Rowss. My name is Emory. And if I told you I came from a world so far away I don't even know where it is in relation to Wellspring of Peace, you'd think I was insane. But it's true, and I wish it weren't."

"I can believe you."

"If you have such faith in me . . .

"Why, why, Lexa? Why do you go with me when I'm only bringing unhappiness and killing to your people?"

She smiled, and the softness of her expression was a pain that twisted in him, for it was noth-

ing like the expression another girl had once worn, and that made him stop to consider which had been the truer. She said, "You have a reason. You aren't bad. There must be a reason."

He kissed her, then. Holding her very tightly, and feeling her heart against his chest. Her hair was smooth and cool, and it was like burying his face in a mist. He hoped he was deluding himself, for if he loved this trusting, wonderful girl, the hurt of leaving would be the worse. For the time was now only minutes away and he'd be gone forever.

And he didn't want to go!

For the first time since he had slipped into the deepsleep trough: "I don't want to leave you, Lexa. I don't want to go." He was crying into her hair.

"Go? Where will you go that I can't teep after you? I'll go where you go."

He shook his head, and she felt the movement. "No, this is further than a teep. It's another life, another world. I don't even know. But I'll be going soon. Can you understand that, and accept that the man who will inhabit Rowss' body will not be me?"

"I'll know," she said, and he did not doubt it.

"But—if it's possible, if there's any God, any justice," he swore, "I'll try to come back here some day. I have something to do, something that is very important to me. But when it's done . . . I'll come back here."

"I've—I've been . . ." he hesitated to use the word, ". . . hap-

py. I've been happy here, Lexa. And most of it was you."

"I can't tell you I'll wait," she said, "because I don't know if I'm that good. But I'll try. I'll try."

There was desperation in her tone, and they huddled against the hay, clinging to one another, and Emory felt the peace he had known on this world—despite his mission—flee from him. He was naked under the stars. Naked to the metal brain of Manuvac, and when he felt the first tentative tuggings at his essence, he pressed all the closer to her.

"I'm going now, Lexa. I'm going, and I wish to God I knew how to — *Lexa!* Lexa, I don't want to go . . . I don't want to leave you . . . Lexa, I lo—"

## CHAPTER 10

IT IS impossible for a rock-crawdad to cry.

They have no tear-ducts; to be specific, they have no eyes.

Cal Emory disliked blindness.

However, the sense receptors in his five hundred sucker-feet made up in part for the lack of sight. The antennae did the rest. He was capable of agility, versatility, maneuverability and eating rocks.

This rock.

The rock he decided he would call Brutus, for it had that same black inside as the Roman, and it was equally as empty of sentiment when the job had to be done.

His job was to eat rock.

Manuvac's instructions: Man will discover this string of asteroids one hundred and thirty-three years hence. At that time the raw minerals used to make power for the force-bead generator will have reached a point of scarcity that will demand replenishment, or Man will falter in his drive outward. On this asteroid is a rich vein of the mineral. As a rock-crawdad you will eat certain areas of rock, inevitably causing a fault which will reveal the minerals needed one hundred thirty-three years from now. You will eat no more than is necessary to unveil these deposits.

Now he was a bug.

At first, when he applied his human intelligence to an analysis of his body structure and the environment around him, Cal Emory thought he would go insane. For a long time he lay there crouched with five hundred legs updrawn into their sockets, and he gibbered at himself. Then, later, he came out of it, and the strength he thought he did not possess—strength that had shown itself more and more during his trials in deepsleep—surged through him, and he prepared to follow orders . . . to eat the rock.

Time passed without meaning, for what meaning can life have to a rock-crawdad? A black, hideous, crawling insect that sucked life from air deposits captured eons before in pockets in the rocks. Often he thought of

Lexa. Less often he thought of the Albino, or Dolly, or Patooch.

He constantly thought of Lederman.

His hatred fanned itself, and regenerated, and he swore, he raved, he pledged himself to even out these years. These years of torment, with no end in sight.

Then, one day without "day" or was it a night without "night" (for wasn't all day and night "night" on this rock in space?) he remembered the ability to teep. It had not been possible when he was on Earth—in fact it was considered a scientific fable. Nor was he able to teleport when he had been the lizard.

Yet on Wellspring of Peace...

An ability possessed by the majority of intelligent beings in the Universe. But a rock-crawdad was not intelligent. It was something in the structure of the brain...

But *he* was a rock-crawdad, and *he* had intelligence.

Wasn't it possible?

At first he experimented, but nothing came of it. The powers weren't apparently damped. Yet as the time crawled by, and his existence became more and more a thing of barest essentials to living, he concentrated on the teeping powers he knew were there. If it was something so common to the races of the universe, then it *must* be there for him. Even as a rock-crawdad.

One day, as he munched his working rock, his anger at his inability to teep overcame him,

and he was fifty feet back in the passage. His amazement took a while to catch up with his basic instincts, and he continued to chew rock for several minutes, until he realized his frustration and fury had brought a vestige of the teeping talent back.

Even then he did not consider what it really meant.

He continued to eat the rocks.

His antennae twitched, and he ground his mandibles over the latest mouthful and realized:

*I'm free!*

It would be a difficult maneuver, not knowing where Earth or The Stone were, in relation to this Brutus, but by carefully teeping in calculated bursts—after a suitable practice period here on Brutus to extend the abilities to their fullest—he could not only find his way through the dust heaps, but would know the way back to Brutus, if he should ever need to do so.

Cal Emory felt certain he would.

He knew a man whose greed and hunger for power would make Brutus an interesting acquisition.

He knew such a man well.

The rock-crawdad hopped across the basalt.

Had it been able, it would have smiled.

Instead, it \* \* \*.

Emory woke as though from a coma. He felt the rock beneath his body, through the loose surroundings of the pressure suit.

Again, as once before, he was on Brutus.

But this time he was a human being. As the memories of his years in deepsleep flooded back upon him, he fought to hold back the pains in his chest, his heart, his soul. The days of praying silently to Gods that did not know lizards or rock-crawdads; the hours spent in daydreaming of the moment of release. Then the bitter terror of not being released as he had hoped, but sent off to another shape, another world.

All those years, all that time, all that waste. To return to Brutus again. He dwelled for a moment on how he had been able to teep back across space to The Stone. It had been a slow, systematic process, but he had done it, and things had happened . . .

He stopped thinking about those things, because abruptly he remembered what he had been doing on Brutus when he had realized his ability to teep.

He had been chewing rock. Trying to make a fault. He had already carved out a great tunnel in the basalt. And he knew where that tunnel was!

For a moment he wished he was a rock-crawdad again. As a rock-crawdad, he had been able to teep. But now—he was a frail human again, and the power of teleportation was a myth, a fable, something the structure of the human brain would not allow.

He cursed the shell of humanity he wore.

Then he began to move across

the shadowed blackness in the direction that hidden tunnel lay.

If he could make it . . .

A rapier of light streaked out of the darkness and though he could not hear it, he saw its approach reflected in the bubble helmet. Emory threw himself forward at a run, and sailed through the low gravity emptiness, landing at a skidding drive into the face of a huge rock. Another blast from the ripper somewhere out there in Lederman's hand—the ripbeam Emory had used to hold Lederman at bay when they first arrived at Brutus—and this time the mark was wide.

Emory crawled forward on hands and knees, hoping he might make the concealment of a jagged outcropping of rock before Lederman realized he was so close to helplessness. The dive into the rocks had jarred him, and abruptly he knew he was getting groggy, for his breath was steaming the inside of the bubble. One of his lines had come loose.

He was not getting the air he needed!

Emory tried to get to his feet, but a wave of nausea and dizziness struck him forcefully, and he slipped back to all fours again.

After fifteen years—agonies the flesh was never intended to know—he was going to die with Lederman so near to destruction. His hatred flamed higher in him, and he dug his fingers into claws,



pulling himself along, around the base of the rock pillar.

Gasps and soft mewling moans came from him, unevenly spaced, and he begged no one in particular—least of all a God—to let him survive for just a little longer. So many hours they had been silently dueling here and—

He remembered where he was, through a haze of oxygen-starvation. He was near the tunnel he had begun as a rock-crawdad. Unconsciously, he realized, he had been heading this way all along. A reflex.

Then the soft, blacker mouth of the tunnel was before him, and he pulled himself into it. His hands groped about and found the hose lines. Yes, one was loose. If he could . . . thrust . . . it . . . back . . . in . . . and he slumped sidewise in the tunnel, wedged between the unyielding rocks, his breath fogging the tiny universe surrounding his head. His hand was still tight about the oxygen hose, but his mind had slipped back and back and back once more, to a time months ago, when he had been on this Brutus, and then gone, and somewhere else . . .

## CHAPTER 11

**H**OW peculiar it had been. How frightening it might have seemed. How long had it taken? Appearing in empty space and instantly teeping away before strangulation could end the fitful journey. Materializing on empty shores and silent

plains. Taking form in the center of heavily-populated cities, a black bug-shape that even aliens with tendrils and sucker-mouths shied away from. But jump by jump, moving carefully and seeking the first recognizable star-formation, the first familiar planet, he had made it.

It had been across two galaxies and the leprosy emptiness between. But now, he was here. He was back on The Stone after—how many?—years.

Around and around on a cosmic merry-go-round, and finally . . . *brass ring!* You're back where you began. And now *the* job would get done.

He looked down at the crushed body of the Guardsman. His pincers were difficult to control. Pressure was something a rock-crawdad could not judge as well as a human. Now he was a bug, but soon he would be a human. First Fileon, then Patooch, then at last, Lederman.

The Guardsman's ripbeam was held tightly in the rock-crawdad's pincer. But he could not operate it. Not yet. He took a shuffling movement backward from the corpse, and teeped away from there.

It took him five days on The Stone, secreted away in the false fuel bottom of a shining, reflective refueling drum at the spaceport, to learn to operate the ripper he held so tightly in his pincer.

Five days, during which time the mirroring surface of the in-

ner drum showed him what he was.

A black, despicable bug.

Then, on the sixth day, he teeped across The Stone, and into the fortress itself. It took the better part of half an hour to find Fileon's office, and the rock-crawdad hesitated only a moment before teeping to the other side of the heavy door.

Fileon sat behind the desk, face buried in administrative paperwork. He looked the same. A little more tired, perhaps, but basically the same. He had not heard Emory's entrance.

The rock-crawdad made a sound.

It was the sound of pity.

It was the sound of revenge.

It was the sound of a scythe carried by a figure in a hooded cape. A figure called death.

Fileon looked up, and the blood drained from his face, leaving it floured and weak. "Lord . . ." he whispered. He made a movement toward a drawer, but the rock-crawdad brought up the pincer with the ripbeam.

Fileon dropped the hand, and soft, blubbering sounds came from his carved lips. At first this had been a creature—a—*something*. Now, it had showed intelligence. It held a ripper on him.

But what did it want? How did one communicate with it?

Suddenly, the black bug was not in the center of the room, pointing a ripper from its hairy pincer, it was gone and then not-

gone as it popped into existence atop the desk, its fetid stench pressing down on Fileon as it looked at him sightlessly. Its antennae twitched.

"Wh—" he tried to speak.

The rock-crawdad tilted its free pincer, and with the sharp edge, scratched fitfully at the desk top. It was a plastic substance, but it could not take the force of pincers intended to crush rock. The terrified officer stared as a word appeared in the plastic's face. When the five, ragged, barely-decipherable letters had been completed, Lt. Col. Fileon began to whine. His face was a map of horror. The continents were etched in fear, the bodies of water were set out in agony. He was in the grip of his own weakness, his own crime, his own death.

The letters were an E, an M, an O, an R and a Y.

"How did . . . you . . . ?"

But he could not finish.

The rock-crawdad disappeared, and reappeared near the door of the office. It beckoned with its free pincer.

When the human had reached the door, the bug touched its slimy sucker-feet with a pincer, and Fileon recognized a command to move out. He opened the door, and they moved down the hall.

Emory remembered the way to the deepsleep rooms.

The officer continued to turn and warily study the bug as it suckered its way wetly behind him. The bug held the ripbeam

steady, its dark mouth instantly ready to spit light and pain.

Fileon knew, of course, what the bug wanted.

It wanted its body back.

He turned in at a room numbered 66. The bug disappeared and reappeared on the lip of the deepsleep trough.

Cal Emory looked down at himself. He was sleeping.

The bug dropped to the floor without bothering to flit in and out of existence. This constant performance of the disappearing ability unsettled Fileon almost as much as the sight of the bug with its weapon.

The ripbeam came up, and the alternate pincer moved to the firing stud. The rock-crawdad made shrugging movements, and Fileon knew what it wanted. He stepped to the wall, where the selector-dials reaching directly to Manuvac's banks were located, and touched the *release* stud. He turned, as if to say he would not do it—

—and a lance of flame sizzled past his left ear, into the wall. Where it struck the radiating lines of blast rippled and solidified in the plasteel. He pressed the *release* stud.

Cal Emory, living in the shell of a bug, realized he would soon leave this hull, and inhabit his own body. But what good would it do to be back in his own body, if the empty shell of the bug still held the weapon? Then Fileon would take it, and force him back into the trough.

He teeped inside the deepsleep unit, under the clear dome settled over the trough, and released the weapon over his body's hand. The ripbeam dropped into the space between trough-wall and hand, and he teeped out again.

Fileon made a move toward the trough, now that the bug had no weapon, but Emory raised his deadly pincers and clacked them ferociously. Fileon moved back. The bug sat there, and Fileon continued to watch it. The rock-crawdad was a mastiff protecting its master.

Emory felt himself dropping, dropping and a fog was suddenly clearing. He looked up and the dome of the trough was over him. Instantly, he realized he was back in his own body; his name had been struck off Manuvac's punishment rosters. He was free! He grasped the ripbeam tightly, and it felt so good, flesh on metal. He could move five fingers, and his knees bent, and the headache he had never felt so good in a million years of headaches.

He reached up, and the dome would not move.

A short blast of the ripper and the latch was shattered. He rose up on buttocks and pressed the dome away with his feet. It moved up on hinged rods and back. He climbed out, the chill of the deepsleep room striking him suddenly.

He was naked, staring across at Fileon, who was held motionless by a rock-crawdad . . . that had no life.

Fileon had not known at what instant the shift had been made, but now he knew he was finished. Emory had returned.

He went to his knees, and clung to Emory's naked foot, crying like a child, pleading, begging with a catch in his throat that made Cal Emory realize Fileon's punishment was already in effect. Killing him would be ending it. He had been living his punishment for a long, long time.

*We're all cowards*, Cal Emory thought.

He shook Fileon loose.

"Take me to Patooch," he demanded roughly, dragging the old soldier to his feet. Fileon was shivering, and his teeth were clacking like castanets. "Now!"

Patooch's first words were screams.

He came out of the trough at a bound, and began scrabbling about on the pasteel floor like a small animal, seeking scraps of garbage. His shrieks became less violent as the moments passed, and finally he stood up.

The one-eyed man was insane.

He gibbered and words of "fire" and "hurt so bad" and "needles" came from his frothing lips.

Then, before Emory could stop him, he leaped, dragged the ripbeam from Emory's grip, and fired directly into Lt. Col. Fileon's white, sweating face.

The officer exploded, spraying the walls with flesh, cartilage, blood and cloth. The reverbera-

tions smote Emory with force, and he clapped his hands over his eyes.

When silence timidly set itself into the room, he opened his eyes. The one-eyed man from Hotspeth stood where he had stood before, the ripbeam extended, a thin wisp of grayish smoke fluttering from the barrel.

He was pale, and his hands shook. Emory stepped to him and gently removed the weapon. Patooch's face slowly, almost somnambulistically, turned up to Emory's.

"It, it was bad," he said softly.

Emory knew how it had been for him, and he had an idea how it must have been for Patooch. He could not really blame the little man. Yet it was done, and they had to get away from here quickly.

"How do you feel now?" he asked.

"I—I must have been a little crazy there for a moment. I—" he walked away and was violently ill in a corner.

Later, when they had found their clothing—clothing put in storage boxes in the walls of each of their rooms—they made their way to the guard room.

With the ripper, it was a simple matter to convince a Guardsman he should convey them to the spacefield, and radio on ahead to have a ship waiting.

"Just tell them Colonel Fileon is with you," Emory instructed the young Guardsman. He did as he was told. They had taken him

to the deepsleep room, and showed him what was left of Fileon.

He did very much as he was told.

The ship was a mite-class vessel, but it had an almost new inverspace drive, and they were well gone on three skit-wise jumps before they decided to talk.

"I still need that job done on my face, Patooch," Cal Emory said to the little cellulist.

Patooch turned and said, "You got me out of that trough. It's the least I can do."

"Will you be able to change me?"

"Who do you want to be?" Patooch asked, a look of confidence suffusing his wrinkled features.

"Call me John Trigg. I want to be a speleospatist."

Patooch moved in the bucket seat. He stood up and bowed to Cal Emory.

"Mr. Trigg," he said pompously, "your face awaits."

## CHAPTER 12

"MR. LEDERMAN?"

"Yes. You're Trigg, right?"

"That's right, sir."

"Won't you sit down? — smoke?"

"No thanks. I'd rather get right down to business."

"I see."

"Mr. Lederman, I was advised that you are head of the largest speleological holdings in the uni-

verse, that you're always interested in a good deal."

"I'm flattered."

"And I'm anxious to become wealthy. I think together we can do it."

"Do you?"

"Yes. I'm not a charlatan, I'm not a visionary, and I *am* a scientist, Mr. Lederman. I have something to sell and if you trust me, you'll want very much to buy it."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, it's very much so. I can't say you're very enthusiastic. You've seen my brief, haven't you?"

"Mr. Trigg, let's get something straight right now: you are a very impetuous and forceful young man, I'll grant you that. Yes, I've seen your briefs, and though they hold back all the really *vital* facts, there is enough in them to interest me. You're in this room now—"

"—I went through your maze—"

"—*you're in this room now*, and that should be explanation enough that I don't consider you a fraud. *But!* I am a businessman, and LedGalac is not a two-bit operation. I have to know more."

"How much more?"

"*Much more.*"

"Sorry."

"Then we're through talking, Mr. Trigg. Good day."

"Just a moment—"

"I *said*: good day."

"Listen, Lederman, I've been cheated twice in my life. The

first time was by a concern almost as big as your own, and the second time by my own half-brother. I had claims out there that were worth billions. I'm broke now. *This* time, I'm protecting myself."

"Well—"

"Now listen a minute. I'm not trying to play cozy, or hold out, or anything at all. I merely want to make sure that this time little Jimmy Trigg doesn't come off with empty pockets. I've got to take precautions."

"Well, I can see your point, Mr. Trigg. But all the same, I've got to be satisfied."

"That's exactly what I want to do. I want to show *you*, personally, what I've got out there to see for yourself."

"On this—uh—where is it in this brief—oh yes—this Brutus? Is that it?"

"Yes, Brutus. A rock; no more."

"Mmm."

"But a rock that's got a strain of minerals for force-bead generators that will make us each a billionaire a million times over."

"Well, perhaps you're exaggerating a *lit*—"

"All I ask is that you come with me."

"I'll send one of my best speleospatists, of course, but I'm afraid—"

"No game. Either you or I take my find to Sunoco Co-Op. They'll be interested, I'm sure. They're not as big as LedGalac, but I'll still make my pile—"

"All right, Mr. Trigg. You

win. I'll go with you. To this Brutus."

"I don't want any other crew."

"What?"

"I'm not letting anyone in on this, not even a leaky-mouthed wiper, until we've signed the contracts. I mean it, Mr. Lederman, I'm watching out for Number One this time. All the way. Those are my terms . . . take it or leave it, but there'll be no compromising for Jimmy Trigg this time."

"I never go out alone, Mr. Trigg."

"That's the way it's got to be."

"I'm sure you can understand why."

"Why me no whys, sir. Either this sounds big to you, or it doesn't. If it doesn't, then I'm off to Sunoco."

"All right, we'll do it your way. But you won't be alarmed if I come armed, will you?"

"Why should I? It's a good idea. Never know what you'll run into out there."

"Fine, then. It's settled. We'll make arrangements for the flight as soon as I can straighten myself out with affairs here. How long will the flight take?"

"Oh, not very long."

"Approximately."

"Say three weeks?"

"Excellent. I think I'm going to enjoy this, Mr. Trigg. I'm rather excited about anything as big as you indicate this Brutus deposit is."

"Mr. Lederman, I'm sure you won't be disappointed."

## CHAPTER 13

THERE was a throbbing in his right shoulder where he had been wedged for several hours in the tunnel. He realized almost as soon as his eyes opened, however, that he was alive. His hand was still wrapped around the air hose. He had managed to attach it, and hold it in place.

Now he sat upright heavily, and corked it in tightly.

Now all he had to worry about was Lederman.

How simple it had been, at first.

They had made the trip out without event, and though Emory-Trigg had watched and waited, still a clear-cut opportunity to kill Lederman had not presented itself. For there was more involved now than just the taking of a life. There was revenge and the accoutrements of same. He had to let Lederman know who he was. He had to gloat, as he knew Lederman had gloated.

But that time had not shown itself, and they had landed on Brutus. Then, as they were emerging from the ship, Emory-Trigg had shoved Lederman down the ladder, and leaped after him with the ripbeam drawn.

It had been only the space of a moment, but when both men faced each other, and Emory spoke hollowly into the bubble intercom, fifteen years quivered in his voice.

"What's the matter with you, Trigg? Are you insane?"

Emory had smiled, then, and said: "Trigg is a stage name, Paul. Just as this face is a stage face. I had a man named Patooch do some work on me—"

"Emory!"

The name rang out, and Cal Emory was certain he heard it go ringing off across the dust-heaps goldenly. He smiled again, and it was a death's head smile.

"Emory, Paul. Cal Emory, who worked for you, and who went through hell to find you and get you alone. Fifteen years, Paul! Fifteen years and oh, Lord, how I've wanted to do it this way . . . how you'll never know my hate for you, and the things you've done to me, the things you've made me do!"

"You're insane!"

"Insane? Yeah, I guess I am, quite a lot now, Paul. Fifteen years can change a man. You lousy, crawling no good bum, how I've wanted to see your face get plastered with fear. How I've wanted to make you suffer like I've suffered. There's no hope for you now, big man of LedGalac. None at all. Don't even pray, because not even that can help you now—"

He had squeezed his eyes shut for an instant, with the excruciatingly wonderful pain of revenge coursing through him, and in that instant Lederman had leaped.

When their scuffle had ended, Paul Lederman had once again gained the upper hand. He had the weapon.



Cal Emory dove for the rocks, and crawled away.

As he had crawled away for years . . .

And now, with only the lektro-knife between him and the flame of Lederman's ripper, he lay in the tunnel, waiting.

He had only emptiness now. To know he was a coward, and to be stripped of even the false courage of the ripbeam, was more terrible than any year in deep-sleep, was more terrible than the sight of Dorothy at the funeral. It was hollowness and dread.

"Come on out, Emory. Come out now!"

He looked toward the end of the tunnel, and the boots were there. Standing and waiting. With Lederman in them. At that instant he wanted to teep so badly . . .

But it was a power the human mind would not permit, and he was damned. So close to the moment of revenge, and to lose it so foolishly. He began to crawl out of the tunnel.

He came out slowly, the lektro-knife drawn and alive. As his hand emerged from the tunnel, one of Lederman's booted feet came down on that hand, and the pain swelled up into a bubble, raced along his arm, and he screamed with pain. The lektro-knife dropped to the rock, and Lederman kicked it away.

"Now get up, you lunatic!"

He stood up, and there was the same hell-fire glowing in Paul

Lederman's eyes. He knew that face, and in the soundless sky of Brutus he heard the sound of the scythe once more. It had become a constant companion to him now, he lived with it all the time.

He was ready, but he did not want to die.

Lederman dispensed with all the amenities.

"I can see now, man. You're not as weak as I thought. You're not strong, Emory. You never were, and you never could be. You're a sucker, don't you know? A born sucker. If I hadn't used you as a symbol of blundering, inefficient worthlessness, someone else would have. Because that's all you're good for. But you seem to have picked up some animal cunning somewhere. So I'll get rid of you as I would a mad dog."

His finger moved toward the firing stud.

And Cal Emory silently shrieked to the night:

NO!

NO!

LET ME LIVE! LET ME DO SOMETHING, LET ME STRIKE BACK NOW THAT I'M HERE! NOW THAT I'VE SPENT MY LIFE, PLEASE DON'T LET IT BE FOR NOTHING . . .

And somewhere in his mind, a barrier crumbled.

Somewhere in his medulla oblongata, where talents lay that other races knew, but talents that were denied Earthmen, something that had been activated in other bodies was for a moment imbued with life . . .

\* \* \*

And he was in under the weapon.

He struck up with his helmet, and caught Lederman directly in the chest. The air whoumped out of the man's lungs, and Emory brought up a booted foot into his groin, as hard as he could.

Lederman went down, and for the second time, Emory held the ripbeam on him.

He stared down at the man he had come across light-years and years themselves to kill. He looked down, and his finger twitched as it hungered for the firing stud.

(There was someone talking to him. The voice was a strong, voice; a voice with a depth of perception in its tones, a realization of meanings, not images. There was honesty and an infinite sadness in the voice, whoever it belonged to. He cocked his head to the side, listening carefully, absorbing what it was saying, because at this moment when Lederman lay nearly-unconscious at his feet, it seemed to him more important than anything he had ever heard.)

He listened, and it spoke, and it said:

"You there...."

"How can a man waste his life so easily? You'd think there would be difficulty involved; someone to stop you, or hazards that set you back in the right course. Or laws that said: you can't kill yourself that way. Because, actually, it's suicide, isn't it? Like using a ripper or throw-

ing yourself under a monorail? It's a sort of death, pledging yourself to a cause that doesn't matter, and pursuing that cause through a lifetime.

"I'm a sucker. I've always been a sucker. Lederman was right: there's one like me born every minute. I've been used and handled and driven by men smarter than myself. I've allowed myself to be made a fool of, and worse than being laughed at, or worse than being mulcted, I've lost my life, yes I have, Heaven knows I have—and yet I still live. And that's the worst of it.

"But I haven't got anyone to blame for it, really. I have no one to yell at, and no one to damn, either. Not anyone. Because nobody *makes* a fool; a man does it to himself. He can do a good job or a bad job, and the better job he does, the bigger fool he is.

"So now I've spent fifteen years with my eyes set on one thing: revenge. I've spent fifteen years and what do I have to show for it? I have nothing, not even the pleasure of the revenge itself. Because how can it be pleasure to kill a coward? Yes, that's the irony of it, the killing funny of it! Lederman's a coward, too. I've always known I was a coward, that I was afraid, and the pat, trite phrases of the hip-pocket psychiatrists who told me everyone is a coward—that didn't change it at all. I bluffed and blustered when I needed a substitute for courage, and I've

come down to this last encounter with my cowardice around my neck like an albatross. *My* cowardice was the open kind, though.

"It's strange, how obvious something is to me now: I could have completed my act of revenge, killing Lederman, many times . . . but it would have cost me my life. I was afraid. So I became devious . . . I wasted years in the execution of a plan that scaled the heights of fantasy in its bizarreness. If I'd wanted to kill, there was always a simple, direct, grass-roots way to do it; not the way I went about it. But I did it the roundabout way, because I knew I just didn't have the makings of a life in me. I didn't have the guts to take life by the throat and bend it to my will. I had to *assume* a life. So I picked one man—more obvious, more ruthless than the others perhaps—from all the men who had used me, laughed at me for the fool I was, and I assumed a life dedicated to killing him.

"As though killing him would make a life for me.

"As though killing him had made me less the fool.

"As though killing him had any rational point to it.

"Because I was afraid of life. Because I knew deep inside myself that if I'd been the sort of man I posed as being, Dorothy would never have married him, that I'd never have become the sort of flunky I did become. I was terrified of life, and so I had to crouch behind a false life, and say: I'm getting even. He has

done me outrage after outrage, and I'll kill him for it. But was he any worse than the others? Not really. And were any of them very bad, actually? No, I don't think so, because they were men of strength, and they saw a fool and they used him. No, they weren't evil . . . like Delpheron, or even frightened of responsibility like Fileon. They saw the fool, and the fool was for hire. And the fool, unfortunately, was a fool who feared living, and who assumed a life, and who pursued one of his mind-made gargoyles, cursing it and blaming it for the agony made by the fool himself.

"Cowardice. That was what I never learned. Every man in his time, in his way, is a coward. There are cowards who live with their fear, who surmount it, and—there are cowards who don't. The worst is the coward who broods over his terror, nurses it, allows it to possess him. I was that sort of coward. A fool and a coward. I damned Lederman for his strength, for his amorality, but he had neither of these. He could *afford* to appear strong; he *had* to be powerful, because his fear consumed him, too.

"And his cowardice. It was as great in its way as *mine* became in *its* way, but they were of different breeds. He was afraid that it would show he was really insecure, terrified of men who really had strength. So he took the inherited power of LedGalac and used it to build mazes, force-

walls, fortresses, because they were physical symbols that fear could not reach him, that he was safe. And he employed men who would bolster his fear. He had the money and the greatness of terror to force him on. Mine wasn't even as good as that. Mine was a puny terror compared to his. He is what he is because he has a great fear that eats in him, leaving him raw and chewed inside. Mine is a small man's fear, a common man's fear. Lederman's is a fear beyond all recognizable proportions. And one day it will consume him completely, burning him to an ash. But I'm not that far gone yet.

"I've lived in fear and terror and self-loathing for fifteen years now. I've thrown away what life I might have found, in the pursuit of something that was not-life, merely the appearance of life, of search, of meaning. But now, I can see who the frightened man really is: not me . . . I'm merely a fool. The frightened man, the cowardly man, that's Lederman.

"And what will it mean to me if I kill a man who is already terrified of me?

"What will it mean to kill him? Will it mean I've avenged anything? I haven't anything to avenge, really. It was all done to me because I allowed it to be done. I was 'the one born every minute' for fifteen years, and longer. I was used by The Albino, I was used by Fileon, I was used by Manuvac most of all

—and should I start a vendetta against the brain?—and I was used by Dorothy the same as the others used me. Even her, long ago; she could never have wanted a man like myself. So what do I hate Lederman for?

I hate him for being a mirror, for being the vessel holding the same fear I hold. And I can see it in him. But destroying him will only allow my vessel to fill with *his* fear. No, killing him is a fool's mission.

"And I want to stop playing the clown.

"I don't know, but I want to find out. Is it possible to stop being a fool, just like that? Is it possible to be something all your life and then suddenly stop? They say people never *really* change. I wonder if that's so. Can you walk down a road that seems to have no end, no detour, and as suddenly turn onto a side path? If I kill Lederman, everything I've spent fifteen years for, will be ended. I'll have accomplished my purpose, and accomplished myself right out of business. Nothing will be left for me. But if he lives on, then I'll know there's no need for my life to end here on this dismal rock.

"No, Lederman doesn't need to die by my hand. He needs to live by my hand, and that, for him, will be worse. Because for once I've avoided playing the fool. For once I've said: 'No, I won't be used. This time by Fate.' I've said, 'No! You've had

AMAZING STORIES

your fun with this clown, but now he retires from the laughing game.' So Lederman, you can live, and I'll turn around, and try to find a meaning somewhere, somehow.

"Somewhere there must be a place where a man can find a little peace and honor at the end of a wasted life.

"It isn't here.

"It isn't in the death of a man who is more coward than myself. A man who died by his own hand long ago."

#### CHAPTER 14

HE STOOD tall and straight (was it for the first time in many years?) and he was ebony against the ebony of space, and the weapon dangled from his finger, and dropped, bouncing, onto the basalt beside Lederman. He stared at the space between the stars, and it was a darkness no thicker than that which had enfolded his thinking for many years.

After a while, he realized it had been his own voice, and he had understood quite clearly what had been said. He turned and walked away. The ship was here somewhere. A beacon-call and they would come back to find Lederman.

His mission was completed.

Fifteen years . . . gone.

Lederman had revived now. He croaked in Emory's ears. "You—you're going to *kill me!*" It was an order, an hysterical order that pleaded and whined

at the same time, at the very borders of sanity.

Cal Emory continued walking. He knew Lederman had picked up the ripbeam from the rocks. He also knew it was leveled at his back, but peculiarly enough, it did not bother him in the least. What could a little pain mean, after so many years of pain, and this greatest of pains . . . knowing that all the years were a waste? Wouldn't oblivion be better than the emptiness he had left? He continued walking, slowly, very slowly.

"Kill me! You've got to . . . you brought me here, you *said* you were going to kill me, now don't do this to me . . . don't let me . . . *kill me!*" He was shrieking like a maniac, into the cavern of the helmet.

Cal Emory reached up to shut off the sound, and at that instant the explosion rocked his brain.

A brief flash reflected in the glass.

He turned. Lederman had finally stopped fighting his fear. He had allowed it to consume him entirely.

Cal Emory stood silently, looking back at the huddled, headless form at the base of the rock pile. Pity and sorrow and an unquenchable determination filled him. Strangely, he felt as though he had lost a very dear friend. Lederman could not bear to see this symbol of his own weakness, a symbol he had used for many years, rising above himself. He could not allow himself to confront his own cowardice

and say: "I know you." He had taken his own way out. Not even the weak man's way out, or the coward's.

He had taken, simply, the frightened man's way out.

The man who had once been Cal Emory, who had once been John Trigg, who had once been coward and fool and fanatic, turned his back on his past, and struck out across the empty black face of Brutus.

There was a ship here somewhere.

And somewhere, too, there was

a place where he had found a few mortal moments of peace and happiness in the eyes and the cool hands of a girl named Lexa. He had no idea where that place might be, but he was prepared to spend the rest of his life looking.

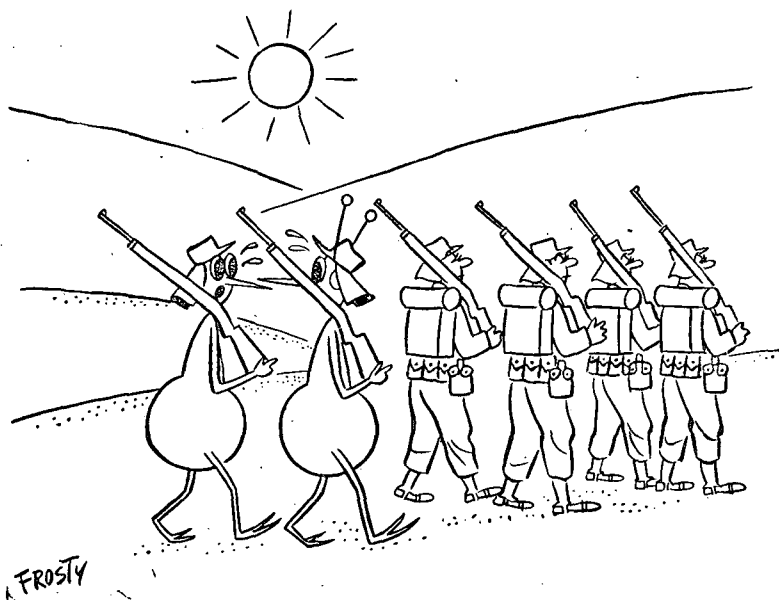
There wasn't a great deal of futility in him, then.

He hoped he might find it one day.

There was reason to expect he would:

He had become an expert in searching . . . and finding.

**THE END**



"I thought there was a catch to that economy plan vacation!"

# THE LARGEST SCIENCE-FICTION AUDIENCE IN THE WORLD WILL SEE THIS ADVERTISEMENT!

FANTASY & SF BOOKS & MAGS lowest prices, list free.  
Werewolf Bookshop, 7055L Shannon Road, Verona, Pa.

THIS AD, which appears in AMAZING's classified section, will be seen this month by the largest science-fiction audience in the world. As the Verona, Pa., advertiser can tell you—it's smart to place your classified ad where it will be read by *real* science-fiction enthusiasts!

If you have something to buy, sell, trade—or if you would like to get in touch with s-f fans throughout the world—try AMAZING's classified columns. It's sure to bring fast results. Yet it costs so little: just 25¢ a word, including name and address or box number. (Minimum message is 10 words.)

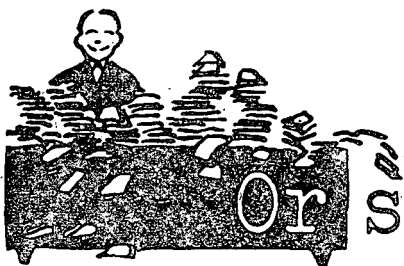
Simply fill in the handy form below—and mail it today!

_____	_____	_____
(1)	(2)	(3)
_____	_____	_____
(4)	(5)	(6)
_____	_____	_____
(7)	(8)	(9)
_____	_____	_____
(10—\$2.50)	(11—\$2.75)	(12—\$3.00)
_____	_____	_____
(13—\$3.25)	(14—\$3.50)	(15—\$3.75)
_____	_____	_____
(16—\$4.00)	(17—\$4.25)	(18—\$4.50)
_____	_____	_____
(19—\$4.75)	(20—\$5.00)	(21—\$5.25)

**CLIP COUPON, ENCLOSE PAYMENT AND MAIL TODAY TO:  
AMAZING STORIES, One Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y.**

Use separate sheet of paper for additional ads.





so you say

Dear Editor:

I thoroughly enjoyed Robert Silverberg's novel, "Collision Course." I've been reading *Amazing* for about two years and I think this novel ranks among the best.

When I looked at Albert Nuetzell's cover on July *Amazing*, I started looking through my maps of the moon and found a group of craters much like those in the painting.

The sight seems to be focused on a plain between the craters Arzachel, Alpetragius and Alphons. But I would appreciate it if you would tell me if I'm right.

Edward J. Lynch  
9 Elijah St.  
Woburn, Mass.

• *Nice try, Ed, but you are wrong, Nuetzell actually focused on the bubbles forming in his morning bowl of oatmeal. (He eats gray oatmeal.)*

Dear Editor:

Bob Silverberg is slipping. It's as simple as that. His novel, "Collision Course," started out as a good novel—until about half-way through. Then some aliens are giving us trouble, we go back to Earth to report to said "higher authorities." Thusly, the space ship meets more aliens who tell us off about how lowly, etc., we are.

About (what seems like) millions of stories have been written on exactly these same lines. What's wrong with it? Everything. Bob Silverberg is my favorite author. But when he comes up with just another bad story, well, its time to turn in my collection of s-f magazines.

Paul Shingleton  
320 26th St.  
Dunbar, West Va.

• *Which way Silverberg? Will he, on his way home, meet an alien s-f writer who tells him off about how lowly, etc., he is?*

Dear Editor:

"Collision Course" in the July issue of *Amazing* was marvelous. I couldn't put it down until the end. How true, as we will meet other civilizations when we break away from Earth and head for distant worlds.

Every one of the novels in *Amazing* have a moral point. It could happen to us.

The short stories were gems in themselves.

W. C. Brandt  
1725 Seminary Ave.  
Oakland 21, Calif.

Dear Editor:

The May issue of *Amazing* was good. The cover was fine and so were the few inside illos. I'm glad to see Finlay is doing inside illos in the magazine, as he is the best s-f illustrator today.

I don't know how the Russians are doing in other branches of science, but they are certainly up with us in science fiction. "Initiative" was good. There is much to be learned through cultural exchange.

After reading "The Galaxy Primes" I can see where Smith got his reputation.

Paul Zimmer  
R. D. #1  
East Greenbush, N. Y.

◦ *Just exactly how do you mean that last crack?*

Dear Editor:

There's only one way to describe the July issue of *Amazing*: Great! Highlighted by superb stories by Sheckley and Douglas. It's undoubtedly the best issue of the year. How about having their stories a little more often?

Dave Boyer  
27 Pardee Avenue  
Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

◦ *The impossible takes a little longer.*

Dear Editor:

Whoever drew the cover on the June *Amazing* should be shot. You'd better stick with Valigursky and Nuetzell. They can draw a sensible picture. The cover on the July issue, though, is something to brag about.

...OR SO YOU SAY

143

Another complaint: E. E. Smith. One issue of his junk was enough, but three! That's just wasting good paper.

The novels are good, only two or three bad ones during the last twelve months. Your short stories are the best anywhere. Keep up the quality. The Spectroscope is great too.

One thing more. Eric Frank Russell's articles were fine, but why not get him to write some s-f? A short story would be good, a novel would be wonderful. How about it?

David Locke  
P. O. Box 207  
Indian Lake, N. Y.

• *One thing at a time, boy. We'll talk to Russell as soon as we get back from shooting that artist.*

Dear Editor:

Count me as one who emphatically favors book-length novels. *Amazing* has published consistently good science fiction in this form, or else the magazine wouldn't have lasted its thirty-three years. Besides, book-lengths are the only way to do justice to top-flight s-f. What's probably bothering reader Nicolas and a few other readers is an attack of "lazyitis."

July's cover by artist Nuetzell is something this magazine can be very proud of. Nothing banal about the artwork, that's for sure. The compositions between the two covers of this issue are just as good. This issue shows the way science fiction should be published.

By the way, how long will it be before Johnny Mayhem or Captain Dark come rolling off the press?

Clark D. Petersen  
Box 138, Main St.  
Yerington, Nev.

• *Both of those characters (or their creators) seem to have been waylaid in a dark alley somewhere. We're still trying, however.*

Dear Editor:

I would like to recommend some reading material to Mr. Milbourn (referring to his letter in the July issue.) I am sure that if he would look closely at the stands in the store where he buys his magazines he will find one with some comic books in it. I suggest he try these because, judging from his letter, he is not nearly old enough to read a magazine with the qualities of *Amazing*, or any of the other top science fiction magazines.

What did Mr. Milbourn expect the four main characters, two men and two women, in E. E. Smith's fine yarn to do? Did he want the

two men to be great big brawny supermen who continually had to rescue two weak, shy, beautiful women from overwhelming hordes of hideous monsters for a ghastly number of years? Then when night came, I take it, Mr. Milbourne expected the two shy little girls to lock themselves in their room while the two heroes sat around the atomic heater smoking their pipes and going over the day's happenings. As I aforementioned, Mr. Milbourn, there are a goodly number of comics on the newsstands today.

Mr. Milbourn, sex has been appearing in s-f for over thirty years, and that alone should show you that it will probably exist in s-f for a good many more years to come. I'll admit that awhile back science-fiction magazines did have too much sex in them, but if you will take a brief look on the stands you will see that these science fiction magazines have either ceased publication altogether or have changed their format completely. Take *Amazing Stories* for example. It used to be you couldn't pick up an issue of it without finding a half-naked girl adorning the front cover, and the stories inside were hardly anything but sex adventures in space. Don't take my word for it, Mr. Milbourn, pick up some of the '56 and '57 issues of the magazine and compare them with some of the current issues and you will, I think, see the great improvement in this magazine for yourself.

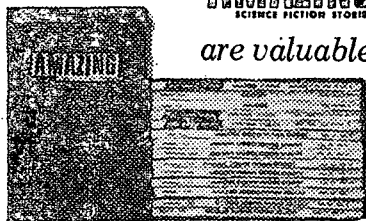
Harry Thomas  
Brookside  
Sweetwater, Tenn.

◦ *Of course, there's nothing wrong with a half-naked girl in the right place, though, is there?*

Your copies of

**AMAZING**  
SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

are valuable!



Keep them neat...  
clean...ready for  
instant reference!

Now you can keep a year's copies of AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION STORIES in a rich-looking leatherette file that makes it easy to locate any issue for ready reference.

Specially designed for AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, this handy file—with its distinctive, washable Kivar cover and 16-carat gold leaf lettering—not only looks good but keeps every issue neat, clean and orderly.

So don't risk tearing and soiling your copies of AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION STORIES—an exciting source of reading enjoyment. Order several of these AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION STORIES volume files today. They are \$2.50 each, postpaid—3 for \$7.00, or 6 for \$13.00. Satisfaction guaranteed, or your money back. Order direct from:

**JESSE JONES BOX CORP.**

Dept. A  
Box 5120, Philadelphia 41, Pa.  
(Established 1843)



# SHOPPING GUIDE

## *Classified*

Rate: 25¢ per word including name and address. Minimum 10 words.  
Send orders and remittance to **AMAZING STORIES**, One Park Avenue, New York City 16, New York. Attention Martin Lincoln.

### BOOKS—MAGAZINES

FANTASY & SF BOOKS & Mags lowest prices, list free. Werewolf Bookshop, 7055L Shannon Road, Verona, Pa.

BOOKS, Pocketbooks, magazines. Tremendous stock, reasonable prices. Lists on request. Science-Fiction and Fantasy Publications, 78-04 Jamaica Avenue, Woodhaven 21, N. Y.

"SANITARY Germs" book \$2.50. Polio, cancer, heart. Dr. Emil Tiesen, Freeman, South Dakota.

I BUY Old sciencefiction magazines. Cooper, 4641 Clintonville, Pontiac, Michigan.

WALDO Scardapane Books: Psysical, Occult, Mystic. Millerton, N. Y. Free Catalog

### INSTRUCTION

FREE Booklet explains sensational courses. Amazing popular piano, modern songwriting, personality courses. Weidner System, 423 E. 7th Street, Boston 27, Mass.

HYPNOTIZE Self, others while asleep with amazing hypnotic phonograph records, tapes, Catalog free. Sleep-Learning Research Association, Box 24-FG, Olympia, Washington.

ELECTRONIC And Aeronautical Engineering Technology. Two-year courses. Bachelor of Science Degree in three years. Northrop Institute in Southern California prepares you for highly paid positions in Aviation and Electronic industries. Employment assistance during school and after graduation. Approved for Veterans. Write for free catalog. Northrop Institute of Technology, 1183 Arbor Vitae, Inglewood 1, California.

HOW To Think—Learn to Deduce, plan, analyze Send \$2.00 for system to Huron Shores Institute, Box 110, Dept. A, Bad Axe, Michigan.

### BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

AMERICAN Overseas jobs. High Pay. Men, women. Transportation paid. Free information. Write Transworld, Dept. 25G, 200 West 34th Street, New York 1.

MAKE \$25-\$50 week, clipping newspaper items for publishers. Some clippings worth \$5.00 each. Particulars free. National, 81-DG, Knickerbocker Station, New York.

CIVIL Service Jobs—Overseas, U. S. A.—mechanical, clerical, professional: List \$1.00. Civil Service Bulletin, 115 Haypath Road, Plainview 1, New York.

FOREIGN Employment Information—\$1.00. Parks, Box 1665A, Lake City, Seattle 55, Washington.

### STAMPS & COINS

REVISED Coin Bargain Catalog, 25¢! Dollar collections: (7 Indian Cents); (6 Liberty Nickels)—both \$1.89! "Prices Paid" listing, \$1.00! Sullivan, 128-FJ East Fourth, St. Paul 1, Minnesota.

### BINOCULARS & TELESCOPES

OPTICAL Bargains—request free giant catalog "CJ." 96 pages—Astronomical telescopes, microscopes, lenses, binoculars, kits, parts. Amazing war surplus bargains. Edmund Scientific Co., Barrington, New Jersey.

### HOBBIES

PAINT And Be Happy: Easy Home-Course in Oils. Trial Lesson \$1.00, specify Marine, Landscape, Still-Life, Skyscape, or Portraiture. No salesman. No contracts. Prickett-Montague Galaxy Studio, Monterey, Massachusetts.

### MISCELLANEOUS

2 WAR Arrowheads, scalping knife. Thunderbird. \$4.00. Catalog 10¢. Arrowhead, Glenwood, Ark.

YOUR Letters remailed from Texas, only 10¢, three for 25¢. Mailto, Box 4373, San Antonio 7, Texas.

SCYSCRAPER-Heel Footwear; Photo Catalog, \$1. Finecraft, Box 442-P, Hollywood 28, Calif.

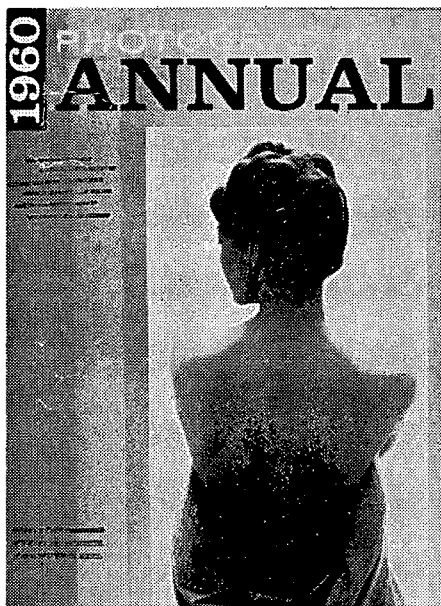
"WINEMAKING; Beer, Ale Brewing." Illustrated, \$2.00. Eaton Books, Box 1242-D, Santa Rosa, Calif.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

# climaxing ten years of great photography... 1960 PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL!

On sale at newsstands August 25

Only \$1.25



You'll enjoy such features as:

- **STEICHEN'S MIGHTY SHOW—  
"PHOTOGRAPHY IN RETROSPECT"**

Brilliant 42-page portfolio on Edward Steichen's panorama of photographic achievement—selected from the permanent collection of New York's Museum of Modern Art.

- **COLOR ESSAY OF THE YEAR**

Marilyn Monroe portrays the movie sirens of yesteryear in Richard Avedon's spectacular color presentation.

- **GIANT ADVERTISING AND  
ILLUSTRATION SECTION**

The top advertising and magazine editorial pictures of the year!

- **INTERNATIONAL PORTFOLIO**

70 pages of outstanding color and black-and-white shots from all over the world!

- **PRIZE WINNERS**

The best from the year's outstanding contests.

- **COMPLETE TECHNICAL DATA ON  
ALL PICTURES—and much much  
more!**

Now in its tenth straight year—here's the world's most eagerly awaited photographic publication!  
It's the 1960 PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL—a handsome showcase of the year's greatest photographs.

# CHART YOUR COURSE IN THE EXCITING, EVER-CHANGING WORLD OF ELECTRONICS

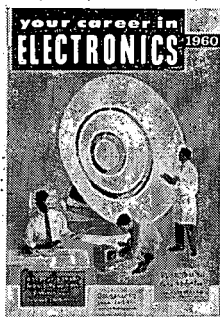
*with the brand-new edition of*

## YOUR CAREER IN ELECTRONICS!

HERE'S YOUR CHANCE to explore the field of the future—Electronics! YOUR CAREER IN ELECTRONICS sums up the wonderful array of opportunities open to you, with informative articles, colorful charts, helpful tips . . . all geared to your own needs.

*You'll enjoy learning about:*

- \* YOUR FUTURE IN ELECTRONICS
- \* ELECTRONIC CAREERS IN COMPUTERS, ARMED FORCES, AUTOMATION, PATENT LAW, STANDARD MEASUREMENTS, and much, much more.
- \* HOW TO PLAN YOUR CAREER . . . SCHOOLING . . . JOB HUNTING
- \* HOW TO MAKE MONEY IN SPARE-TIME ELECTRONICS
- \* And many more authoritative, helpful features.



ON SALE AT YOUR NEWSSTAND

September 10

Only \$1.00 in U. S.

(\$1.25 elsewhere)

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY • 434 S. Wabash Avenue • Chicago 5, Ill.